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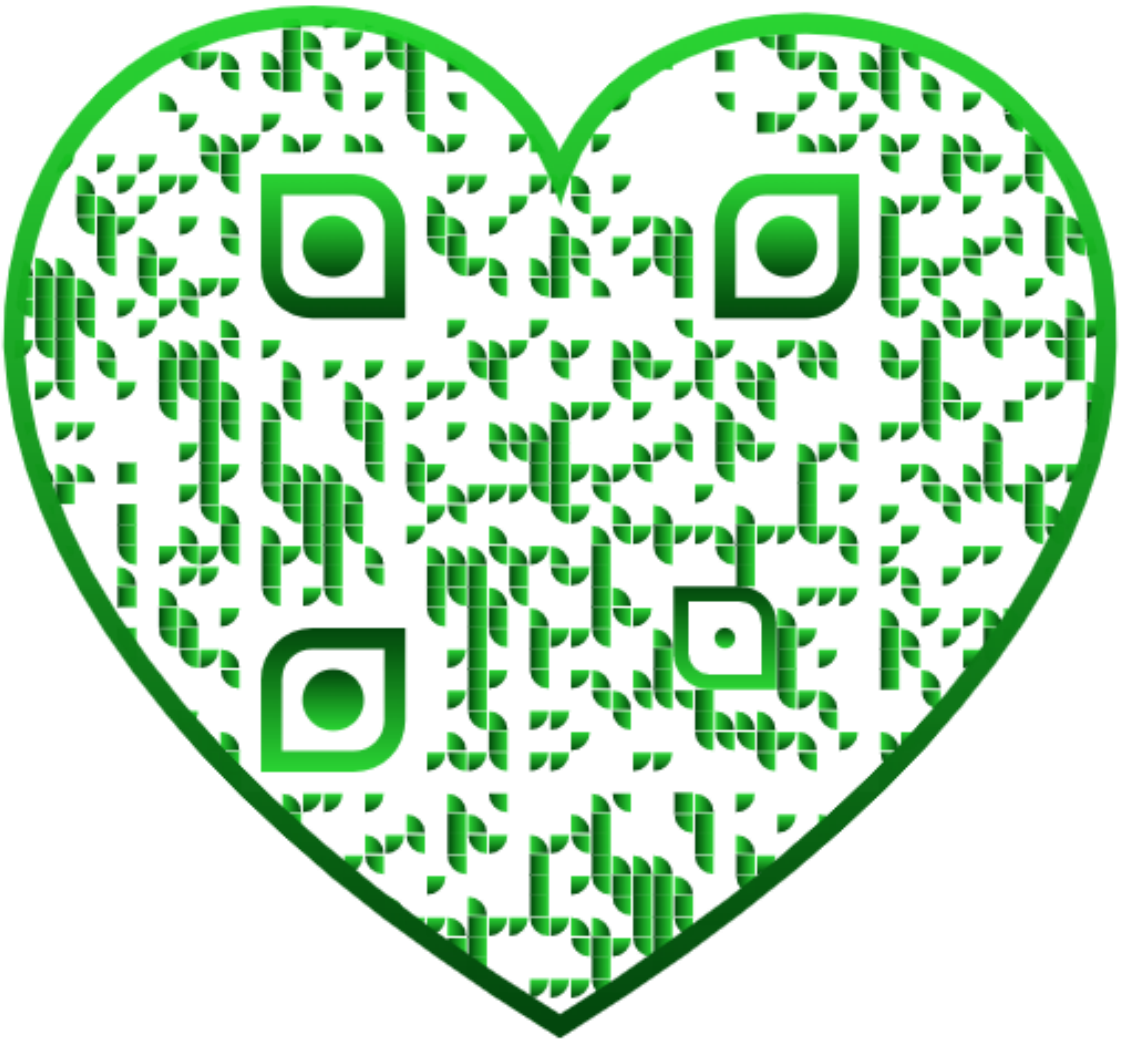

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Stepping stones

We may be living in uncertain times, ladies and gentlemen, but one sure-fire way to revitalise your guitar sound without reducing your piggy bank to smithereens is to invest in a new stompbox or two. Whether it's a subtle boost or compressor that's a constant in your signal chain, or a mind-melting box of tone-crunching psychedelia, the likelihood is that you can find inspiration for less than a couple of hundred notes. It's true that the number of new pedal releases can be somewhat belwildering these days, so let us be your guide through the latest and greatest offerings from boutique upstarts and household names alike – the smorgasbord begins in our reviews section on p75.

Elsewhere this month we present Slide School: a beginner's guide to all things slide that will arm you with the basics required to make your first foray into the expressive and lyrical world of slide guitar. We've also enlisted Ariel Posen, one of the rising stars of the electric slide scene, to give you some priceless pro tips that will help you along the way. Turn to p46 to get started.

Another highlight this month can be found on p58, where we interview Angeleno singer-songwriter Phoebe Bridgers, one of the most spellbinding and eloquent new artists to emerge in the last couple of years. If you haven't heard it already, her 2017 debut album *Stranger In The Alps* comes highly recommended – it's been on constant rotation in my car for almost a year now and I'm still hearing new textures in its lush and expansive sonics. Enjoy the issue and I'll see you next month...

Chris Vinnicombe Editor
chris@guitar.com

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THE *Money Shot*

FENDER CUSTOM SHOP JAZZMASTER

Our encounter with this month's subject of The Money Shot was one of those heart-stopping moments that makes you consider selling two or three guitars to finance the kind of sublime and endlessly inspiring musical instrument that only those at the very pinnacle of their craft can offer.

Fender Custom Shop Masterbuilder Paul Waller is one such luthier and this Journeyman Relic in Gold Paisley is a virtuoso rendition of a guitar that, as even its biggest admirers will admit, can often be something of a rollercoaster ride when it comes to stability and playability. Not so here – with an exquisite '65 C neck profile that's been artfully aged to feel like an old friend, even the Jazzmaster's much-maligned vintage-style bridge behaves itself, while the hand-wound pickups offer a delicious and engaging mixture of twang and harmonic complexity.

Hear it in action over on YoutTube at youtube.com/theguitarmagazine, where we put the Fender through its paces alongside a pair of stompboxes from SolidGoldFX and a magnificent Carr Skylark combo. At the time of writing, this guitar is still available for £5,499 from Coda Music in Stevenage (www.coda-music.com). It might be well into vintage Jazzmaster money, but you'll struggle to find an old one as good as this...

YAMAHA
CUSTOM MADE

PRIVATE COLLECTION

TONE MOUNTAIN

Guitarist Neil Ivison has toured the world as a tech working with the likes of The 1975, Klaxons and Corinne Bailey Rae, and his interest in vintage instruments has recently developed into a guitar-building venture of his own. Chris Vinnicombe finds out more…

PHOTOGRAPHY RICHARD SHAKESPEARE

Growing up in Herefordshire with a Wurlitzer jukebox in his living room meant that Neil Ivison's relationship with music was cemented at an early age. Although he distinctly remembers Little Richard's scream kickstarting an obsession with the crackle of old vinyl records, his "lightning bolt" moment came on 16 December 1991 – "I still remember the date!" he admits – when his mother and DJ father took him to see the mighty Status Quo at Birmingham NEC.

"I went to school for the next 18 months, wearing the Status Quo t-shirt my dad had bought me from the gig, it was my prized possession," Neil remembers. "Coincidentally, at the same time, the music teacher started a guitar club, teaching guitar after school. I was straight there, first in line, with a list of Quo songs, 'I just need three chords to play these, don't worry about the rest!'"

Then at high school, members of staff that had their own band helped Neil and some fellow students put a group together, mentored the fledgling act for a summer and organised an end-of-term concert. Playing in front of 300 screaming kids was mind blowing," he recalls. "At that moment, any chance of academic qualifications went straight out of the window, I was obsessed!"

TECH SUPPORT

By the time Neil left school, he'd already been playing in function bands for about three years. "I'd already got a 'job', so to speak. I did go to college and get a diploma in sound engineering but, in rural Herefordshire, I didn't really have many options available to me so I ended up selling parts for tractors for three years while doing three or four gigs a week in the evenings. Then, by chance, I got a call from a guy I knew who needed a guitar tech urgently for a gig at Download Festival. So I jumped at it.

"It was on the main stage on a Sunday morning and the lead singer sang the whole set suspended above the stage with four meat hooks in his back! Then the guitarist smashed his guitar and set it on fire… that was my introduction to guitar tech'ing! Another tour followed and I realised I absolutely loved being on the road, regardless of if I was playing or as crew, so for the next 15 years, I juggled both.

"I love the travel, the camaraderie, the panic when things go wrong, the thinking on your feet or the elation of a great gig that we made happen against the odds. And with this came the need to learn how to set up, repair and maintain instruments for a variety of different players. Through playing music and touring, I have met some amazing people and have been to some amazing places over the years. In fact, I would

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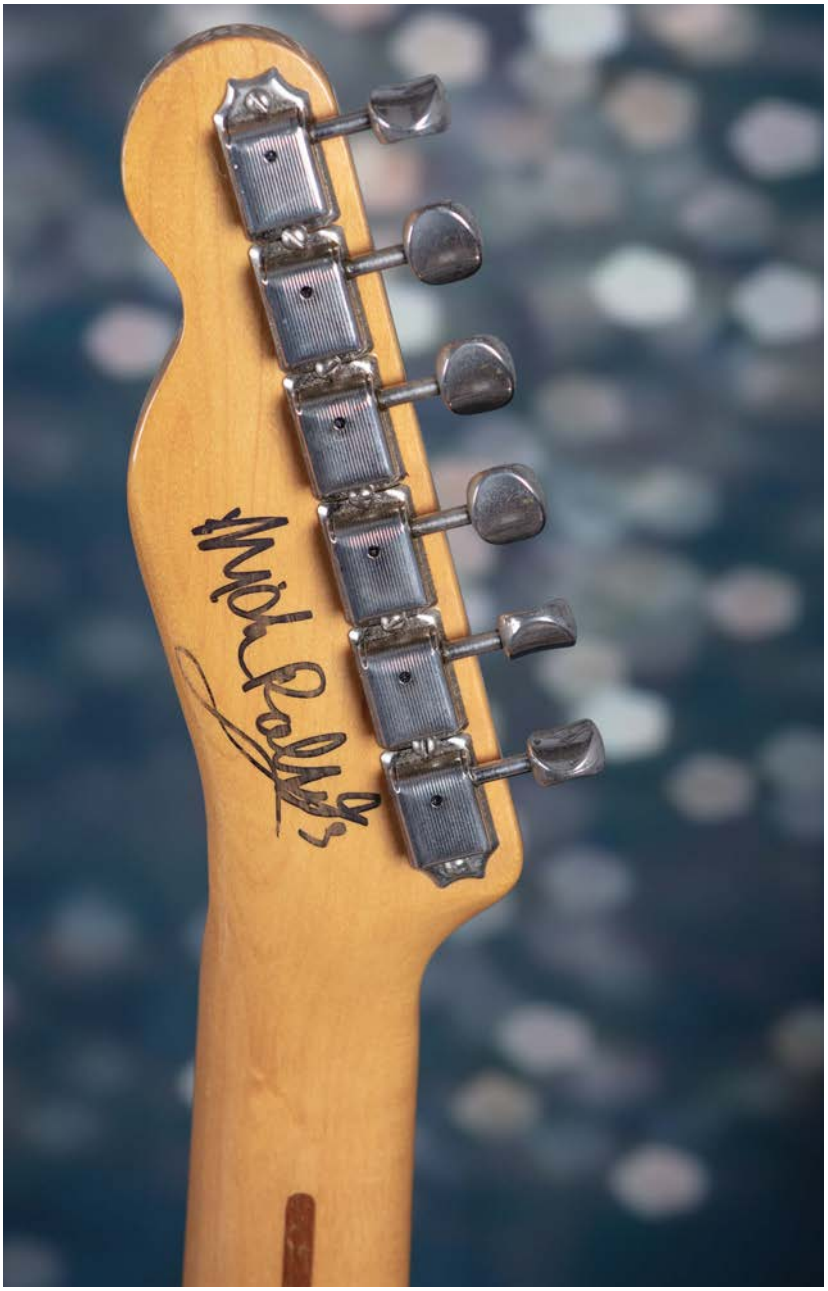


say, bar school friends and people I grew up with, most of my friends I have met directly or indirectly through playing guitar, including my wife! So I really do credit the guitar with forming my adult life."

STRIPPED DOWN

Given that his collection betrays a love for no-nonsense, workhorse instruments such as Telecasters, Juniors and Specials, we wonder how far Neil's personal gear choices have been informed by his experiences as a guitar tech. "It just came from my need for a functional guitar when playing myself," he says. "I've never been one for lots of switching because, nine times out of 10, I'm the frontman/singer too so, the less to confuse me the better – I'm easily confused!"

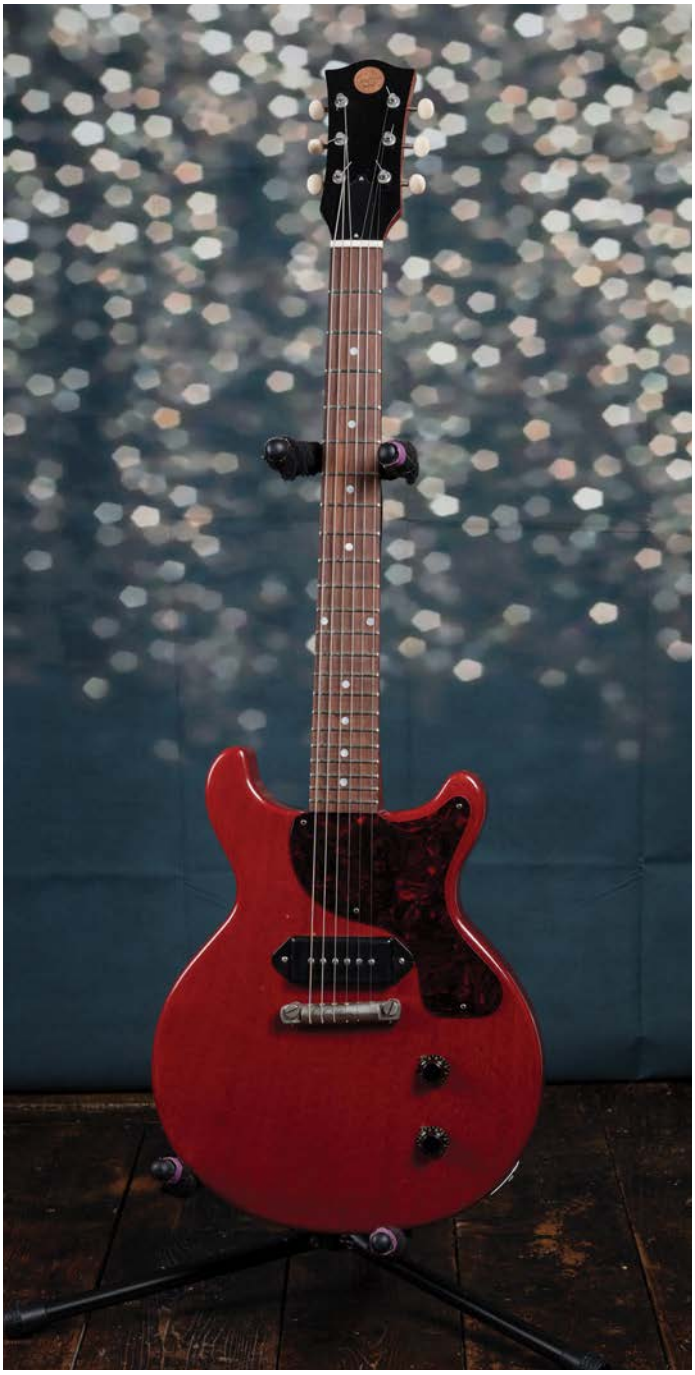
Although primarily a fan of single-pickup electrics, Neil is "learning to love" the neck pickup on his '65 Telecaster: "I was watching That Pedal Show when they did a vintage guitar episode and Dan [Steinhardt] was playing a '64 which sounded great, so I decided I needed to find one and this one came up at the right time. It just sounds spectacular through any amp you put it through. It's pretty raunchy – almost like an SG if you dig in with some dirt. I love it! The week I got that, four songs seemingly just fell out of it so I've nicknamed it 'Magic'! My pal Charlie Starr from Blackberry Smoke loves that guitar too, I took it up to a show in Birmingham for him to use and he fell for it big time, so he has first dibs!"

When it comes to influences, Mick Ralphs was a major one for Neil: "I've always been a massive fan and he used a Les Paul Junior for most of the Mott The Hoople and the early Bad Company albums so a Junior was a no-brainer, really. I've had a good few now, both single- and double-cuts but the single-cut Les Paul Junior, for me, is the perfect marriage of style and functionality. It literally only has the bare essentials to function, needs nothing else and just sounds otherworldly!

"A great, microphonic P-90 can really scream but just wind the volume back and it'll clean up to a whisper and sound almost like an acoustic. Even where the volume and tone controls are placed is perfect for me. That big 50s carve mahogany neck fits my spade hands perfectly and a good Junior will just vibrate in your hands... I've had a couple that you'd be in danger of getting RSI from! Plus, that 50s two-tone sunburst just stirs my loins! As does TV Yellow... and Cherry Red!"

Opposite **This 1986 Fender Esquire was previously owned by Mick Ralphs – the guitarist hand-painted the scratchplate black so it matched his '57**

Above **Eagle-eyed readers will have spotted this 1965 Telecaster in Vintage Bench Test back in March 2017. See much more of it over at theguitarmagazine.com**



Above left **This 1957 Les Paul Special had been refinished in a poly gold/silver before Neil bought it and returned it to the original TV Yellow**

Above right **Neil has started building Les Paul Junior-style guitars under the Ivison Guitars marque. Visit facebook.com/ivisonguitars to see more**

BUILDING BLOCKS

All that said, Neil doesn't own a 1950s Junior at the moment. "I sold my last one to fund something else," he admits, "but I do have a '57 Special that came to me with a bizarre silver/gold poly finish so I restored that back to its original TV Yellow. That guitar has the quintessential late 50s neck carve which just feels like home and the P-90s are some of the most expressive I've ever heard, they have this top end, almost three-dimensional sparkle to them."

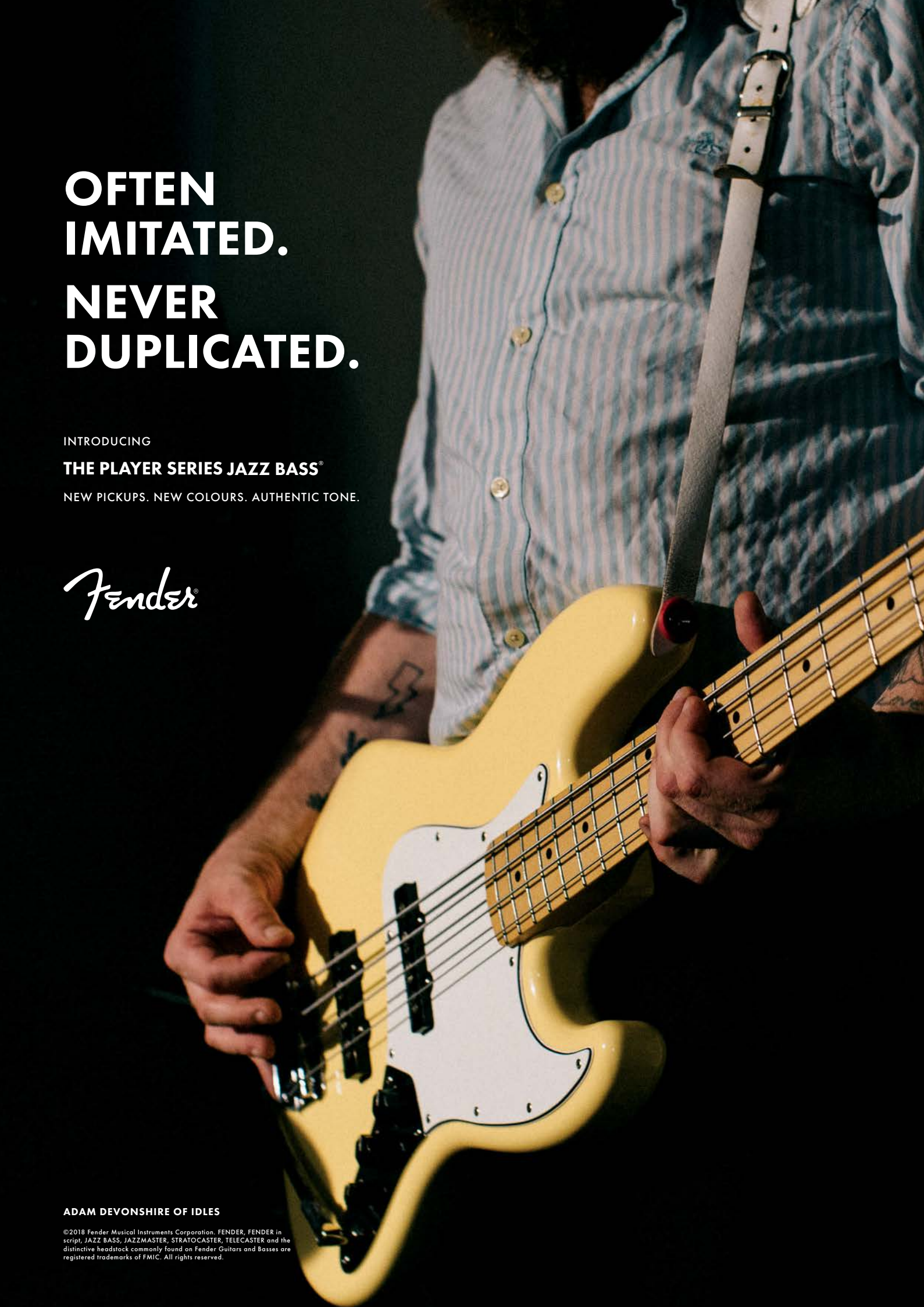
Vintage Juniors are rising in price, and this was in part the motivation for Neil to build his own tributes, under the Ivison Guitars banner. "The other part being that I'm totally obsessed with Juniors and Specials!" He laughs. "So I've started hand building vintage-accurate guitars from the measurements taken from 50s Juniors and Specials that I have owned in the past.

"I've had a '55, '56, '57 and a couple of '59 double-cuts and I meticulously measured each one so I could get as close to a vintage-feeling guitar as possible. The idea being that a gigging player can take these out and gig them without worrying too much about having a £5,000 guitar in tow that may get damaged, or worse. It's taken a long time to get them sounding how I want but I'm confident they are as close, in feel and tone, to an old Junior as you can get with modern materials."

GLORY DAYS

The 1989 Gibson ES-335 in Neil's collection has a storied history linked to Rockfield Studios in Wales, where Neil has recently been recording with his current band, Americana outfit Stone Mountain Sinners. "There's a shop in Hereford called Head, Hands & Feet that was literally a porthole into the music world for us young guitar players from the outlying villages. Pete Overend Watts from Mott The Hoople would often be in there with some weird and wonderful vintage guitar he'd found at a boot sale or flea market getting it repaired.

"One day I was there, I was 16, and a chap who happened to be Noel Gallagher's guitar tech came in to



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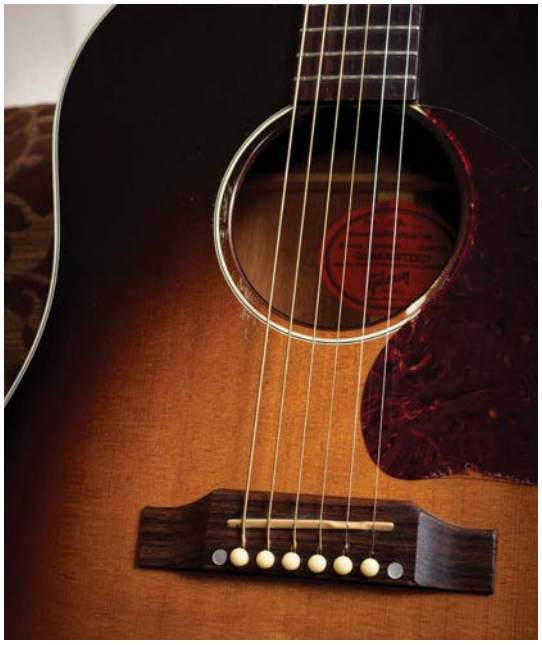

This page **Neil's Gretsch resonator and 2002 Gibson Historic Collection J-45 acoustic, complete with headstock repair**

Opposite **Neil at Rockfield Studios in Wales with the ES-335 that featured on many hit records in the 1990s**

drop off a guitar. The shop used to hire guitars and amps to Rockfield Studios and this 335 was a regular down there in the early 90s. The Charlatans, The Bluetones, Teenage Fanclub and Bryan Adams had all used it previously and then Noel Gallagher had hired it for the *Morning Glory* sessions. He needed a guitar with a Bigbsy and loved it so had asked for it again to use for some of the *Be Here Now* sessions, too, which was when I first saw it.

"I wasn't into Oasis at the time at all, I was actually into punk bands especially the Backyard Babies and The Yo-Yos. Those guys all used 335's but when I asked to have a look and opened the case, my immediate thought was 'Chuck Berry'! I have to have it! Alas, Colin the owner said it wasn't for sale. So I just spent the next two months badgering him until he relented and begrudgingly sold it to me! And I've had it ever since.

"I just wish I had some written provenance of all the records it's been on! The thing I find with a 335 is that it is incredibly versatile. It'll do jazz and blues... even country. But if you wind it up through a Marshall or what have you, it'll out-rock a Les Paul... in my humble opinion, of course!"

HOT GLASS

When it comes to amplifiers, Neil's tastes are similarly fuss-free, prioritising simplicity, build quality and reliability. Despite "slipping down the pedal rabbit hole for a while and coming out unscathed," he doesn't use many stompboxes these days. "I like to get one great, edge-of-breakup sound from the amp and then use the guitar volume knob to clean up," he explains. "Personally, I think the more parts an amp has in it – the more switching, gain boosts, mid cut, deep switches, whatever – it just robs them of tone.

"As with guitars, I like an amp that has just enough parts to function and function well – this might be a throwback to my time as a tech, the 'there's less to go wrong' mentality, but I just find that a simple amp sounds better to me. The boutique amp builders seem

Gibson
YAMAHA
KRK
CUSTOM MADE

to follow this trend, too, so it just confirms it to me. I like the fact that you can contact the builder directly if there's a problem, you don't have to email 'customer services', you go direct to the organ grinder.

"I remember when my pal Graham got a Matchless DC30 and it was just the most beautiful looking amp we'd ever seen, it was built like a tank and just sounded incredible! And there was barely anything on it in terms of controls compared to a multi-channel combo. It just had what you needed and nothing else. I took me 10 years to be able to afford my own, but I did!"

Neil's number one amp for the last decade has been a Bad Cat Black Cat, "which is essentially a DC30 that Mark Sampson built after leaving Matchless," he says. "In fact mine is one of the very first and it is full of Matchless-branded parts! That's the number one 'go to' amp. I've just picked up a Matchless Lightning Reverb that is outstanding too.

"I'm also a big fan of Top Hat amps. I have a love/hate thing going on with the tweed sound currently, the Lazy J 20 is exceptional – I've had four J 20s and two J 40s over the years! – but I find it's not suiting what I'm doing at the minute so I'm heading back to EL84s again.

Another amp that I've probably had the longest of all is one of the first runs of the Orange Tiny Terror. Again, it's so simple and reliable and just sounds great! And it cost me less than the flightcase for the Bad Cat! We're a funny bunch, us guitar addicts!"

NEW ADDITION

The aforementioned Mick Ralphs influence is a big one for Neil, to the extent that he now owns a pair of the star's guitars. "I have a 2002 R8 Les Paul that was his main guitar for about 10 years – the guitar he was playing the first time I saw him live actually – and a pal from The Fretboard forum alerted me to an '86 Esquire that was for sale in London so I bought that unseen.

"I was on holiday at the time and had to wait two weeks before I could get it! Mick is a notorious tinkerer when it comes to guitars – he loves to try out different pickups, wiring et cetera like we all do – it has upgraded pots and a killer bridge pickup, I'm not sure what it is but it sounds great! Anyway, when I got it I took the scratchplate off – Mick had hand-painted it black to match his original '57 Esquire – and underneath he'd written 'Property of Mick Ralphs, Bad Company. Piss Off!' I don't think there's more authentic provenance of ownership than that!"

As our conversation draws to a close we ask the inevitable question: what are you looking to add to your collection next? "Well, it's not so much a 'collection' in the truest sense, more a collection of instruments that all get used regularly and gigged," says Neil. "It's just unfortunate for my bank balance that I generally prefer vintage guitars! There's nothing I dislike more than having a guitar on a stand, covered in dust and not getting used.

"I'm on the look out for another 50s single-cut Junior if anyone has one... but the holy grail would be Mick Ralphs' '57 Esquire. It was used on my two favourite albums and on the song we had as the first dance at our wedding... but I don't think that'll happen any time soon! You know, at the minute, I'm actually pretty content with what I have. Ask me again next week, though..."

***Tones Of Home* by Neil's band, Stone Mountain Sinners, is released on 1 October. Visit www.stonemountainsinners.co.uk to find out more**

Opposite left **This 2002 Gibson Custom R8 was Mick Ralphs' primary guitar for a decade**

Opposite right **Neil's 1977 Fender Telecaster Custom**

Above **Neil's current amps of choice are his long-serving Bad Cat Black Cat, and a Top Hat Emplexador, "the best sounding vintage Marshall you've heard!"**

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

TWO'S COMPANY

The ES-225 was Gibson's first thinline hollowbody, and yet it doesn't get the same attention as its golden-era Kalamazoo siblings. But with original P-90s and a fabulous neck profile, it's one of the few remaining 50s Gibsons that doesn't cost rockstar money. Huw Price discovers a sleeper that's primed to wake up...

The ES-225 is one of relatively few 50s Gibson models that flies under the radar. Maybe it's because it was a short-lived stopgap between the deeper bodied ES-175 and the later ES-330 and ES-125T models. It could also be that no big name players are closely associated with the model.

When introduced in 1955, the ES-225T was Gibson's first thinline. Although it shares the same laminated body construction and outline as an ES-175, Gibson opted for a single P-90 pickup placed centrally and a longer version of the trapeze tailpiece used on the earliest Les Pauls. Two-pickup ES-225TD models were introduced the following year. The ES-225 was available in Sunburst and in this rather handsome Natural finish option. The latter guitars – known as the ES-225TN and ES-225TDN depending on pickup configuration – are rarer and more collectable.

THIS 1957 EXAMPLE OF AN ES-225TDN MUST BE ABOUT AS GOOD AS IT GETS

The ES-225 was phased out in 1959 and models from that year feature Gibson's smaller trapeze tailpiece in conjunction with a separate floating bridge. The single-pickup versions seem to have all-rosewood bridges while the two-pickup models have an ABR-1 mounted on a rosewood base – although ABR-1s do have a tendency to go missing.

This 1957 example of an ES-225TDN must be about as good as it gets. The natural lacquer has aged to a luscious

Top **Nuts on the front of the bridge can be tightened or loosened for basic intonation adjustment**

Bottom left **This example still has its original plastic strap button wedged into the body**

Bottom right **Gibson's trapeze bridge was designed for strings to be wrapped over rather than under and used this way it plays well and sounds superb**

honey amber and besides a dent below the fifth-fret side dot, some strap rash around the nut area and some very minor scuffs at the end of the headstock, the finish is almost unmarked.

Our only gripe is a strap button that has been retrofitted to the heel, at the cost of two frets in upper access. Locating it there wasn't the best decision – we would remove/relocate it in a heartbeat. On the plus side, an inspection mirror reveals original pots and a pair of bumblebee tone capacitors, and the original knobs and switch tip have remained intact.

IN USE

Prior to this guitar's arrival, the trapeze tailpiece/bridge caused some concern – largely because of its infamously unsuccessful implementation on 1952 and '53 Les Pauls. On ES-225s, however, it's used as intended, with the strings wrapped over rather than under. It quickly becomes apparent why Les Paul specified this bridge for his signature guitar – it's a substantial piece of hardware that is absolutely rock solid, feels smooth and comfortable and most

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This image **The maple fillet in the cutaway is most commonly associated with 50s Les Pauls, but the ES-225 actually has two of them**

importantly, sounds tremendous, with the full frequency resonance and sustain that we have come to associate with mid-50s wrapover tailpieces.

Intonation will never be as accurate as it might with a tune-o-matic-equipped 1959 ES-225, but collector Rob Sampson – a man who has owned examples of both – gives us some insights into the sonic differences. He explains, "The long trapeze does add to the sustain, but there's not that much in it". From a tonal perspective he notes,

THE ES-225 PRODUCES HUGE POWERCHORDS WITH A THROATY ROAR

"There's a more immediate bass response with the strings wrapped around the trapeze and more 'snap', like you get on a wrapover Goldtop. I don't hear that much difference in fullness of sound though, as both configurations are loud and rounded tone-wise." He also reveals that both the trapeze and ABR-1 configurations sustain far better than the models equipped with all-wood bridges.

Since the ES-225 is said to be the precursor of both the ES-125TC and the ES-330, it might be helpful to compare this example with our '62 ES-330. With a fresh set of 0.010s on both, it's clear that the ES-330 sounds louder

KEY FEATURES

1957 Gibson ES-225

- **PRICE** £4,995
- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Laminated maple body with set mahogany neck, Brazilian rosewood fretboard with dot markers, 20 frets
- **HARDWARE** Individual Kluson single line tuners, trapeze tailpiece/bridge
- **ELECTRICS** 2x P90 pickups, individual volume & tone, 3-way switch
- **FINISH** Clear nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 624mm/24.56"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.9mm at nut, 52.1mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.0mm at nut, 51.0mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.85kg/6.29lb
- **CONTACT** ATB Guitars **www.atbguitars.com**

Top **As usual the pickguard has warped, but it doesn't affect playability and they're easy enough to flatten out if you prefer**

Bottom left **The fingerboard extension doesn't 'float' and there a substantial mass of wood underneath, so sustain doesn't suffer above the body join**

Bottom right **Individual single line Kluson tuners with plastic buttons are correct spec for this model**

and brighter, while the ES-225 is mellower, deeper and has significantly more sustain.

It's much the same plugged in, as the ES-330 combines clean chime with a more wiry and aggressive overdriven tone, but we often find ourselves struggling for sustain. In contrast, the ES-225 could almost fool you into thinking it's a Goldtop. The ES-225 is also more even across the board and feedback is easier to control at high volume.

Turn it down, and the ES-225's subtler side comes through. The rock beast becomes a woodier and more versatile guitar, with neck jazziness, a twangy countrified quack on the bridge and an in-between tone that could rival any Gretsch for fingerpicking and rockabilly duties.

With the shimmed bridge pickup, The ES-225's pickups are far better balanced and its full tonal range is that bit easier to access. As for the pickups, it could be that the ES-225's naturally full tone exaggerates the differences, but the 50s P-90s somehow sound clearer and more detailed despite being a little darker. They're more dynamically responsive, too, which combined with the more balanced and even response, makes the ES-225 a more effortless and inspiring guitar to play.

THIS ES-225 IS AN EFFORTLESS AND INSPIRING GUITAR TO PLAY

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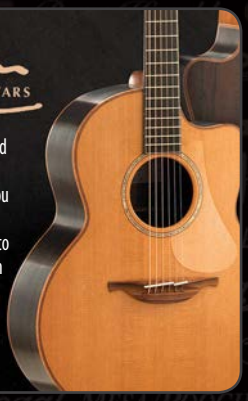

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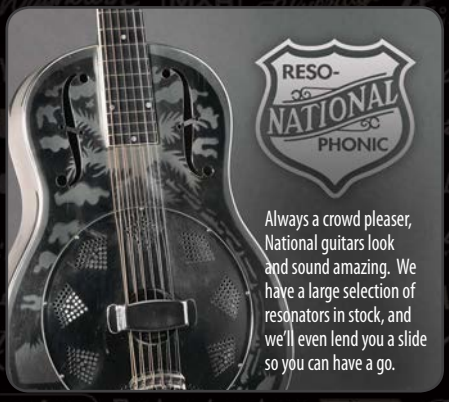

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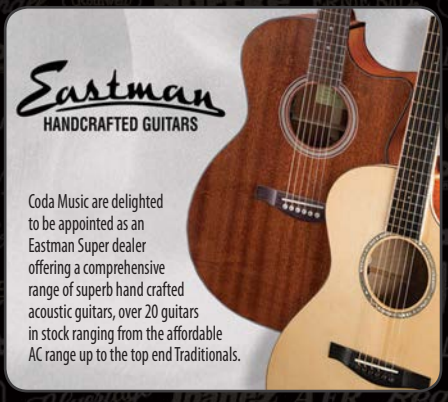
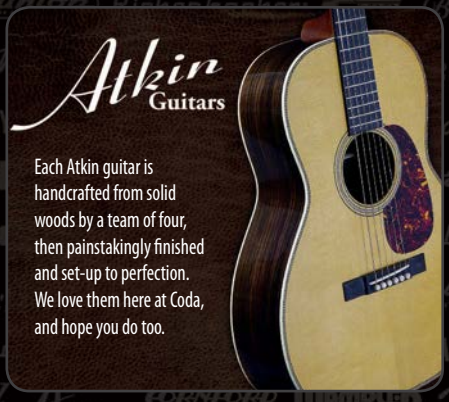


Coda Music are delighted to be appointed as an Eastman Super dealer offering a comprehensive range of superb hand crafted acoustic guitars, over 20 guitars in stock ranging from the affordable AC range up to the top end Traditionals.

Atkin Guitars



Each Atkin guitar is handcrafted from solid woods by a team of four, then painstakingly finished and set-up to perfection. We love them here at Coda, and hope you do too.

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Collings GUITARS

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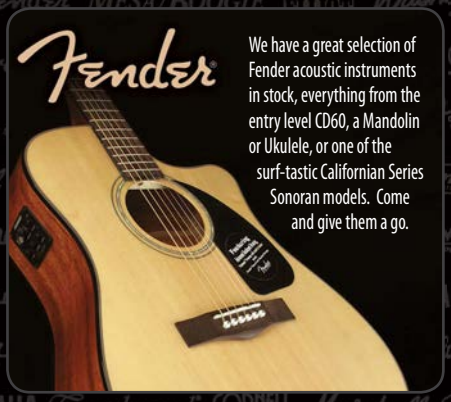
Fender



We have a great selection of Fender acoustic instruments in stock, everything from the entry level CD60, a Mandolin or Ukulele, or one of the surf-tastic Californian Series Sonoran models. Come and give them a go.

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Top **Thanks to a shim under the bridge unit, ES-225 pickups are better balanced than they tend to be on an ES-330**

Bottom **As a traditional archtop builder, maybe some at Gibson felt that painting the edges of the F-holes would disguise the laminate top**

Given that it's an original 1950s Gibson in superb condition, we were hoping that this guitar might be something special… but in truth this ES-225 has completely exceeded even those lofty expectations. In fact, it's something of a revelation because if you have ever dreamed of owning a 1950s Gibson, an ES-225 is surely the cheapest way to do so and yet, there are no apparent compromises.

You get the same wiring harness and controls that were fitted to even the most collectable vintage Gibsons, along with a Brazilian rosewood fretboard, and a neck profile that is essentially indistinguishable from those found on the canonised 1956 and '57 Les Pauls. The tuners and pickups are no different either, and given the choice between 50s or 60s P-90s, these earlier ones are our clear favourites – in every sense.

ES-225s must be among the few remaining 'bargains' that are left in the vintage guitar world. Granted, £5,000 is a lot of money, but if you can live with a sunburst finish, these guitars are often available for a lot less. In fact, not a whole lot more than a secondhand Gibson Memphis reissue.

IT'S THE CHEAPEST WAY TO OWN A 1950S GIBSON WITH NO COMPROMISES

Irrespective of whether you're interested as a player, an investor or a bit of both, an ES-225 is a guitar you can enjoy using while watching its value increase. Meanwhile, some of us at the mag are already eyeing up our lesser-used guitars, pedals and amps and wondering how much they might fetch on Reverb. It really is that good.

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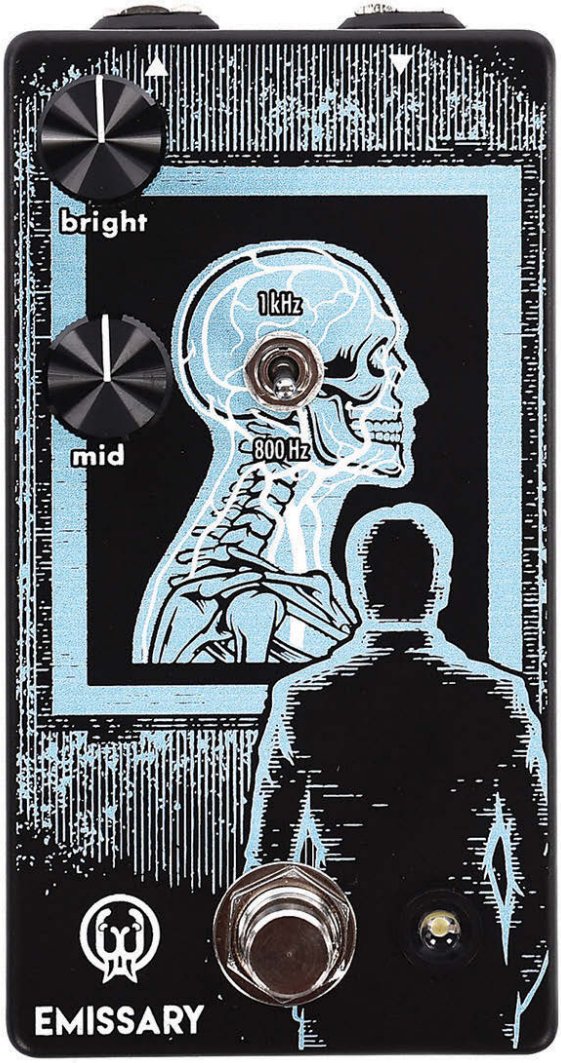

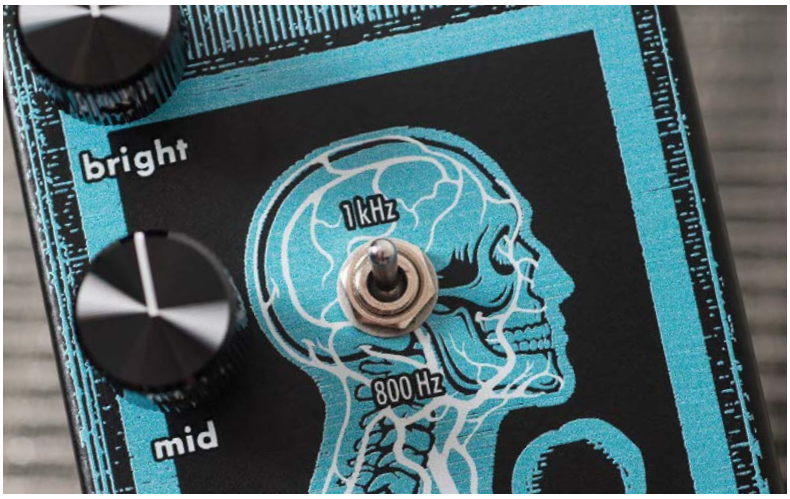

COMPETITION WORTH £169!

WIN A Walrus Audio Emissary Parallel Boost

TERMS & CONDITIONS

The closing date is **12.00AM GMT, 3 NOVEMBER 2018**. The editor's decision is final. The competition is open to UK residents only. By entering The Guitar Magazine competitions, you are agreeing to receive details of future promotions from BandLab UK Limited and related third parties. If you do not want to receive this information, you can opt out. This giveaway is open to over 18s only. For full terms and conditions, please go to bnd.la/gm-ctos

It's easy to take the humble boost pedal for granted, but in the right hands – and with the right pedal – boost can be a hugely versatile and musical addition to your pedalboard, no matter what style of music you're playing. And now, thanks to the good folks at stateside boutique pedal maker Walrus Audio, we're offering you the chance to win the fantastic new Emissary Parallel Boost, as reviewed last month.

The Emissary is a two-in-one boost pedal in a compact, high quality enclosure that's designed to make leads stand out, slides sing, fingerpicking come to life and to push tube amps into great natural breakup. The Emissary has two independent boost circuits that run in parallel, working together to help make your tone a 'sinus-clearing experience', as Walrus rather amusingly suggests!

Deceptively simple, the Emissary has just two knobs and a toggle switch. The top knob controls the volume for the 'bright' boost circuit – a clean, high-headroom JFET boost, with a slight emphasis on higher frequencies to liven up your tone. The bottom knob controls the volume for the 'mid' boost circuit, which features a targeted boost at either 1kHz or 800Hz selected by the toggle switch. You can use the two boosts on their own, or mix them together at your leisure, simply by turning up each knob to the desired level. Cleverly, the bypass footswitch features a momentary function, so you can press and hold to activate the pedal, only for it to disengage as soon as you release the switch.

We reviewed the Emissary in our October 2018 issue and were impressed with the functionality contained within such a simple layout noting that, "It's surprising just how much ground you can cover with such minimal controls... the Oklahomans certainly know their stuff when it comes to ingenious pedal design." To find out more about the Emissary Parallel Boost or other Walrus Audio pedals, visit www.walrusaudio.com, and to be in with a chance of winning one for yourself, simply head to the link below and answer the following question:

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/emissary

Q Which of these artists currently has a Walrus Audio signature pedal?

A Bryan Adams **B** Ryan Adams

C Bryan Ferry

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1957 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster
1959 Gibson ES-330 TD
1960 Gibson ES-345 TDSV Cherry PAF's
1962 Gibson ES-335 TD PAF PAT
1964 Gibson ES-335 TDC
1966 Gibson ES-345 TDSVC
1967 Gibson ES-335 TD
1968 Gibson ES-335 TDC
1956 Gibson ES-225 TDN Blonde
1959 Gibson ES-175D Players

1964 Gibson ES-330 TDC
1967 Gibson ES-330L Burgundy

1954 Fender Stratocaster
1956 Fender Stratocaster totally MINT
1963 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White (2 off!)
1963 Fender Stratocaster body refin
1965 Fender Stratocaster Lake Placid Blue
1965 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1969 Fender Stratocaster maple cap s/b
1970 Fender Stratocaster Blonde
1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB

1953 Fender Esquire
1956 Fender Telecaster
1956 Fender Telecaster body refin
1965 Fender Telecaster Blonde
1965 Fender Custom Telecaster Shoreline Gold..!
1968 Fender Custom Telecaster Candy Apple Red
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline

1959 Fender Jazzmaster Blonde
1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
1966 Fender Jaguar Olympic White

1953 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop (2 off!)
1956 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1955 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1958 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1970 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1973 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Goldtop
1954 Gibson Les Paul Junior + amp
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1960 Gibson Les Paul Junior

1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior 3/4
1961 Gibson Les Paul SG STD Polaris White
1963 Gibson Les Paul SG STD
1962 Gibson SG Special
1965 Gibson SG Junior Polaris White

1964 Gibson Firebird VII
1963 Gibson Korina Flying V White

1966 Fender Jazz Bass Sonic Blue MINT
1959 Gibson EB-2 Bass
1980 Musicman Bass MINT!

1978 Gretsch White Falcon MINT

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1967 Gibson ES-335 TD Pelham Blue

1957 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster

1952 Fender Telecaster Blackguard

1956 Gibson Les Paul Standard MINT

1969 Gibson Flying V

1964 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White

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Letters from *America*

MARK BAIER

VICTORIA AMPLIFIER COMPANY

For a quarter of a century, Mark Baier has been chasing the dream of recapturing that elusive sound of the classic Fender amps of the 50s – and his Victoria amplifiers are proof he succeeded. Dave Hunter meets a man with a remarkable passion for vintage fidelity...

The boutique amp boom was fuelled by the desires of guitarists who couldn't find what they were looking to play — whether in satisfactory renditions of vintage amps or modified modern designs – and decided to get their hands dirty and build the things themselves. Such was the birth of Victoria Amplifier Company. Working as a stockbroker by day and playing blues around Chicago's ever-fertile music scene by night, founder Mark Baier had discovered the magic of Fender's tweed amps of the 50s, but sought the same tone in a more reliable and more affordable modern reissue... only to discover they just didn't build 'em like they used to.

"I had bought a reissue Fender Bassman and I'd had a real one," Baier tells us. "I bought the new one thinking it would be new and great, but I was disappointed and realised that part of the mojo was the way they were built." It seems there was nothing for it, then, but to build the things himself, and to adhere as closely as possible to the components and construction techniques used by Leo and co back in the day. Thus began a quest that soon resulted in some of the best-respected reproduction tweed amps ever made, followed by several more original designs that have ably shown off Baier's more creative side.

A MAJOR TRANSFORMATION

With all of the suppliers and online resources available today, the would-be valve-amp maker can easily fill out a parts list without even having to rise from his or her desk. Back when Baier started Victoria, however, the effort was far more challenging.

"Everything's quite a bit more accessible if you're a young lad looking to build your first tube amp," he says. "When I did that back in the late 80s you really had to search to find the transformers, to find the schematics, the parts. Many of the parts I had to make myself. Now you pick up a Mojotone catalogue and you can build your own amp."

One insanely fortuitous discovery amid Baier's quest for accurate components came from his search for period-correct transformers. Speaking with another parts supplier one day and venting his frustrated efforts at locating accurate transformers, Baier was told, "Oh, I know a guy who used to work at [original Fender transformer maker] Triad. He's retired now. Why don't you give him a call?"

Baier takes up the story: "He gave me the number, and it turned out I was calling this old guy in Arizona who'd initially made the transformers for Fender. I told him I'd called Fender trying to acquire the original specs, and they had no idea what I was talking about. I'd called Schumaker and what was left of the Triad company, and nobody knew what I was talking about. I was relating all this, and the old guy, whose name was Tom, said, 'Well, the reason that none of those people have any of those specs is that when I retired I cleaned out my desk and took them with me.' He had all the original old winding data that was initialled by Leo Fender and dated '1958'. And he gave me every one of them, and I was able to take these engineers' specs to my transformer manufacturer here in Chicago and say, 'Build these transformers just like this!' And they said 'no problem!'"

20TH CENTURY BOY

In addition to the access to parts and information, Baier has seen a lot of other changes in the high-end amp market since he founded Victoria nearly 25 years ago in 1994. There's a lot more competition in the market now, certainly, but one of the major obstacles involves the effort to promote and publicise his products. "I am a 20th Century person at the end of the day," Baier adds, "and I love magazines, I read magazines, and I like the ads in magazines. I can't stand the ads on the internet. They drive me crazy.

"When I first started, my first substantial sales numbers were the result of a product review I got in a blues magazine called *Blues Review Quarterly*. One

Mark Baier personally tests every Victoria amp before it leaves the shop

Master Builder JoAnne Klein uses her more than 15 years of experience to build a Reverberato reverb/tremolo tank

of the writers was Bob Margolin, who had played with Muddy Waters, whom I'd had an opportunity to meet. So I called the magazine and they gave me Bob's number, and I talked to Bob. I sent him an amplifier, and Bob gave the amplifier a five-star review – it was a tweed Super, the first amp I made – and as a result of that little article in a quarterly blues magazine I must have sold 40 amps. Holy cow! And that's when I realised, 'Maybe I've got something!'"

HOOK ME UP

It's easy to forget today — when you can't swing a Tele without hitting a good tweed-inspired clone or some homage to those timeless 50s Fender designs — that just a little more than two decades ago, your only real option if you were hell bent of acquiring that sound was to track down an expensive original, and hope it didn't fall apart on tour. In the intervening 25 years, Victoria's vintage-reproduction amps have become the go-to for countless working professionals seeking an easy and reliable means of fulfilling their need for tweed.

Among the several facets of the 'tweed mystique', Baier cites the simplicity and elegance of the circuits, with few extraneous components to get in the way of the tone; the resonance of the solid pine cabinets and their thin 'floating' plywood baffles; the liveliness – to the point of microphony – of the circuit boards themselves and the components mounted on them; and the fortunate confluence of so many well-made parts that simply came together to sound good.

One component that's often overlooked, however, is the stuff that strings it all together. "The hook-up wire!" Baier declares. "That solid, 22-gauge copper wire. I think it's got a real character of its own. It's a solid conductor, so you've got this extremely subtle kind of top-end. The top-end is recessed, but it's not that it's muted or muffled or anything, it's just one of those things that you hear in an amp, and I can almost tell when it's got stranded wire in it [rather than solid], and that's most amps."

Alongside the wire itself, though, is the way in which Fender used it, and Baier and co have been strict about following the template laid out in Fullerton more than 60 years ago.

"The way you dress the wire in the chassis, that's one thing that I'm very meticulous about personally," Baier relates. "And JoAnne [Klein] and Maureen [Baier] who build the chassis are very meticulous about how they route that wire along the chassis and to what extent it creates a subtle capacitive effect. That's on purpose."

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Having long established Victoria as a leader in tweed repros, Baier has also created some more original designs – albeit amps that are often inspired by vintage circuits and build techniques. His aforementioned Silversonic packs the legendary tweed Bassman circuit into a 1x12 combo generating 20 watts from a pair of 6V6s, with reverb and early-60s-era harmonic tremolo squeezed in for good measure, while the Sovereign applies nifty design twists to a more Marshall-inspired 50-watt template with EL34 output valves.

Of all the newer efforts, though, one of the faves is a re-think of the smallest of the collectible tweeds. The Tweedy Verb is a tweed Champ circuit adapted to a 1x12 combo with

“ON THE BACK OF ONE MAGAZINE REVIEW I MUST HAVE SOLD 40 AMPS. HOLY COW! AND THAT’S WHEN I REALISED, ‘MAYBE I’VE GOT SOMETHING!”

Mark’s wife Maureen does many jobs around the company, but here she’s soldering a hand-wired 518 circuit board

reverb and the ability to both swap in larger output valves for more power and to scale the rectifier tube upward for more punch and solidity.

“Chicago Music Exchange did a Champ shoot-out with Jeff Tweedy from Wilco, with Jeff’s original Champs and one of mine. They told me, ‘Mark, yours was just the best! Tweedy couldn’t believe how much better the Victoria sounded!’” And the key to the tonal splendour of Baier’s Champ (dubbed the 518 in Victoria speak)? “This is one of those dirty little secrets, but my Champ amp is my only reproduction amp that is not 100 per cent honest to the original, in that we use a much larger output transformer, and we beef up the rating on the cathode resistor to the power tube. The output transformer’s the size of a tweed Super output transformer, but it’s a single-ended transformer, it’s a big piece of iron. The output transformer on the originals is the size of a peanut.” All of that translates into the Vicky Verb, along with the great-sounding buffered effects loop of the Sovereign head and – voila! – the result is an amp that has quickly won a lot of favour among studio and small-club players. “Put in a 6L6 and a GZ34 rectifier and you can easily take it to the next blues jam,” Baier declares.

So what’s next? Amid the shifting sands of the boutique market, Baier has identified the need for a versatile sub-20-watt amp head at a good price, and has just the thing bubbling on the back burner at the time of writing.

“It’s going to be a dual-EL84 or 6V6 head with a stepped attenuator,” he reveals. “I’ve been messing around with attenuator circuits and I think I’ve found one that really works well – it’s not that expensive and it’s really groovy. It will have the effects loop from the Sovereign, and it should all fit into that compact chassis from the original Hammond reverb amps – at a price of $1,000 to $1,300.” Bring it on!

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The Guitar Magazine COMPETITION WORTH £302!

WIN Fender Effects Pedals: Engager, Full Moon & The Pelt

TERMS & CONDITIONS

The closing date is **12:00am GMT, 3 November 2018**. The editor's decision is final. The competition is open to UK residents only. By entering The Guitar Magazine competitions, you are agreeing to receive details of future promotions from BandLab UK Limited and related third parties.
If you do not want to receive this information, you can opt out. This giveaway is open to over 18s only. For full terms and conditions, please go to bnd.la/gm-ctos

When it comes to creating inspirational guitars and amplifiers, it's rather understating things to say that Fender has been knocking it out of the park for the best part of 70 years now. But if there's one aspect of the guitar game that Fender has never quite nailed, it's effects pedals – until now. Fender went all-in with effects pedals in 2018, releasing a broad range of new stompboxes that were designed in California with the input of gigging musicians, studio professionals and industry experts. But you don't need us to tell you how good they are – thanks to Fender EMEA, we're giving one lucky guitar reader to sample the charms of the new Engager, The Pelt and Full Moon pedals themselves!

The Engager, Full Moon and The Pelt are the three newest additions to a rapidly expanding pedal range that Fender is keen to stress represents a long-term commitment to effects pedals by the brand. The Engager is a boost pedal, The Pelt is a filthy fuzz and the Full Moon is a distortion with a built-in boost feature. All three pedals are made using Fender's sleek, curved-edge anodised aluminium exteriors, while they also feature such fantastic player-friendly innovations as LED-backlit knobs so you can see them on stage, and one of the most ingenious and easy-to-use battery compartments we've ever seen.

The Full Moon is a high-gain distortion that offers great sonic sculpting potential thanks to an three-band EQ plus Texture and Bite switches to vary the clipping and midrange characteristics, while a 12bB boost is ideal for solos. The Engager boost meanwhile offers everything you need to kick things up a gear with a three-band EQ, switchable mid-frequency range and the option of true or buffered bypass. Finally, The Pelt is a gnarly, splatty fuzz with Bloom control to shape your sound, a switch to boost or cut your mids, and a Thick switch to add some extra girth.

"If you go back to the very early part of Fender's history, we built working tools for working musicians," said Fender's Stan Cotey, who was a key figure in developing the new range. "They were built for function first, and we kept that same spirit in these pedals." To find out more visit www.fender.com, and you can read our full review of the Engager, Full Moon and The Pelt on p86. To be in with a chance of winning them, however, head to the following link and answer the question below:

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/fenderpedals

Q Which of these is NOT a current Fender effects pedal

A Pugilist **B** Santa Ana **C** HOG

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THE REVERB TOP 10

PEDALS UNDER £50

Everyone loves a bargain, right? And with each of these stompboxes setting you back less than 50 notes, there are steals for everyone. Reverb's Dan Orkin counts down the top 10...

While peering wistfully into the pedal cases at your local guitar emporium or browsing the endless pages of used stompboxes on Reverb, it often seems like the builders in the guitar effects business are engaged in something of an arms race. Every passing month brings a new crop of feature-packed units to the table, each upping the ante of sonic possibilities and function, and in many case, carrying eye-watering price tags.

High-end and boutique pedals do, of course, have a significant audience, but for many players, the prospect of forking out several hundred pounds on a guitar gizmo is tough to justify. Luckily, at the other end of the price spectrum sits a vast range of more affordable toys. With this month's rundown, we're looking squarely at that category: the ten most popular pedals you can pick up for less than £50.

These rankings are based on the average used price of each model sold over the past year on Reverb. Savvy shoppers would do well to utilise the 'make an offer' option found on most listings on Reverb to land the best bargain possible – and always bear in mind that you can use Reverb to sell your under-used gear to fund that next acquisition if you need to!

Have you seen a pedal you need to add to your board? Head to Reverb.com to bag one for yourself!

1 Electro-Harmonix Op Amp Big Muff Pi
Electro-Harmonix has done a commendable job of launching new models at prices that most players can afford. Recently, the Brooklyn-based manufacturer has reissued a set of Big Muffs from different points in its history including the Op Amp Big Muff. This classic circuit is known for its biting fuzz tone and is famously favoured by Billy Corgan.

2 TC Electronic PolyTune 2 Mini
The PolyTune series of pedals from TC Electronic have the added advantage of being able to show the tuning status of every string at once – a real time-saver at gigs. The PolyTune 2 Mini comes in a smaller-sized enclosure than the standard edition, making it a great choice for any player with limited pedalboard real estate.

3 Electro-Harmonix Green Russian Big Muff
Another Muff Reissue, the Green Russian is based on an early 90s Big Muff made in Russia. These particular Muff variants are prized for their full, bass-heavy tones and are commonly found on the boards of sludge and doom metal guitarists and bassists.

4 Electro-Harmonix Soul Food
When the Soul Food came out a few years back, it was instantly the pedal that everyone wanted to audition. Based on the revolutionary – and terrifyingly expensive – Klon Centaur overdrive, while it is by no means the first pedal to attempt to emulate that famous circuit, it was the first to do it in such an affordable and readily available package.

5 Ernie Ball P0-6180 VP Jr Volume Pedal
Volume pedals are an oft-overlooked (though certainly impactful) pedal genus, and Ernie Ball remains their most popular maker. This particular volume pedal, the VP JR 250k, is designed for passive instruments such as electric guitars, earning it a top spot on this list.

6 Ibanez Tube Screamer Mini
Earlier in this decade, the pedal market experienced what can only be described as a mini-pedal craze, with tons of different brands offering bite-sized versions of their most renowned circuits. Ibanez's first entry into the format was the Tube Screamer Mini, which crams the classic overdrive circuit of the famous TS-9 Tube Screamer into a diminutive enclosure.

7 Boss DS-1 Distortion
One of the most popular pedals of all time, the DS-1 is about as basic a distortion circuit as they come. But its simplicity has proved to be a strength – for a wide range of rock and metal players, the DS-1 serves as a perennial, budget-friendly gateway into what pedals are all about. And if it was good enough for Kurt...

8 Dunlop GCB95 Cry Baby Wah
There are a lot of different wah pedals out there, and even many that fall into the Cry Baby series from Dunlop, including multiple signature models and special editions. The GCB95 is the standard entry in the line. In production for decades, there is always a decent stock of used examples to try out.

9 Boss NS-2 Noise Suppressor
Another utility pedal, the Boss NS-2 Noise Suppressor does exactly that: suppresses noise. Whether you're dealing with extraneous buzz or a less-than-ideal power situation, the NS-2 a reliable way to clean up your signal and clarify your tone.

10 Boss BD-2 Blues Driver
The Boss BD-2 is a straight-forward overdrive that does exactly what it says on the tin without giving your bank manager the blues, too. A decent-sounding stompbox for Texas blues flavours in its own right, this pedal is frequently modified by circuit tinkerers. It's not uncommon to find modded examples floating around the used market.

Ones TO Watch

CHRIS STILLS

His surname might bestow a certain cachet of musical pedigree, but Chris Stills remains an artist that's defined by his own work – whether that's on film scores or activism. He tells all to Sam Roberts...

It might surprise you to learn that Chris Stills didn't begin playing guitar until the age of 12. Although he is the son of legendary musicians Stephen Stills and Véronique Sanson, Chris' musical journey didn't exactly begin as you might expect.

Having played piano from an early age, he came to the guitar later. "I was on the road with my dad in Salt Lake City. His guitar tech, Doug Breidenbach, asked me out of the blue if I played guitar. It was strange because in that moment for the first time I realised that no, I didn't!"

Following his new-found love of six strings, Chris remained part of his father's touring entourage for a while, briefly forming a band with Adam Cohen, before releasing his debut album *100 Year Thing* via Atlantic Records in 1998. His self-titled sophomore album came in 2005. Following a hiatus from the music industry he's finally ready to return with *Don't Be Afraid*, his first record in 13 years. "There were a few gear changes in that period of time. There was a musical, a movie, and the making of a French record that was never released." He admits. "I moved back to LA to focus on my family. The making of this record was done bit by bit with my own money as I had no label, so I think it just took the time that it needed."

Written and recorded following his move back to California in 2012, *Don't Be Afraid* is Chris' most sincere body of work yet. When asked about the background of this record, he presents himself in a modest and reflective manner. "All the songs on this record are inspired directly from my personal life in one way or another. I'll spare you the details, but there were ups and downs and some tough times."

Despite his reserved response, Chris' time away from the musical limelight has evidently brought with it a fresh perspective. When asked about his hiatus he responds with a smirk. "Don't we all ripen with age? I think what you get on this record is something authentic from me that isn't overly influenced by anything or anyone. I'm not trying to play

what's popular; I'm just doing it the way that I love doing it."

His rejection of current popular music is evident through his influences, with the likes of Pink Floyd and Tom Petty's impressions audible on *Criminal Mind* and the title track, respectively. He puts this down to a French approach to writing and listening to music. "While I was in France, I fell into a French way of approaching music which can be very different to the American way. When I went back to Los Angeles I dove right back into my roots, and the music that truly inspired me to want to do this in the first place."

Chris' impressive musical companions don't only extend as far as his parents. He collaborated with David Saw and Natasha Bedingfield on *Don't Be Afraid*, along with long-time *TGM* favourite Ryan Adams. "Ryan and I became friends when I played on his epic record *Gold*. He now has a little studio called PaxAm, and he invited me to come be creative there. We jammed a lot, throwing ideas at each other with great immediacy. He came up with the bridge to *Criminal Mind* on the fly!"

"Ryan Adams and I became friends when I played on *Gold*. We jammed a lot, throwing ideas at each other"

DUAL THREAT

Music isn't Chris's only love, however – and part of the reason that he hasn't had much time to put out records in recent years has been his successful acting career, both in the US and France. He states that acting stole his heart before he found music, but "there is a freedom that one has when recording one's own music that you just don't have as an actor in a movie or TV show that you didn't write and are not directing."

Alongside acting, Chris has managed to combine his two passions through working in motion picture soundtracks, including work on the Oscar-winning *I, Tonya*. Despite his love for both the screen and the stereo, he found the experience much more difficult than he expected. "To make a piece of music or a song work for a scene in the movie was so much harder than I could've ever imagined. To hit the right mood, to not over complicate things, and to not distract from what's actually going on in whatever scene takes a keen awareness that I've learned and applied to my own music."

You'd be forgiven for thinking that being a touring musician and successful actor wouldn't leave much time for many other interests – but you'd be wrong. Chris Stills is also a keen environmentalist and activist, namely working alongside Autism Speaks as part of their Light Up The Blues benefit concert.

"For the past five years I've been co-producer and musical director of Light Up the Blues," he reveals. "I get to work with amazing artists that I love and admire so much. Heading back into a studio environment after being so close to some of the greatest artists in the world can have its effects, for sure."

With his worldwide tour set to continue right up to the New Year, Chris's multi-faceted output – whether through performance, film or activism – shows no sign of slowing down. For now though, he's just looking to find the time to organise the ideas on his voice recorder. "Currently I'm sorting through all my little ideas and Dictaphone bits that I have recorded over the last few years... I'm just trying to find two weeks here or a month there to focus!"

***Don't Be Afraid* is out now on Rive Gauche Music**

"The Wailer Wah performs every bit as well as wah pedals costing five times as much."
–Guitar World

"Not only does it have a great sound and smooth sweep range all wrapped up in a lightweight, pedalboard-friendly package, but it comes in at a price that is simply astonishing..."
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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: Doing ill-advised things to a Beatles amp, and the search for a holy grail guitar...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

BEATLES FOR RENT

Hi guys, I was very interested to see the article in October's issue about the Maton guitar George Harrison had loaned and played in 1963. My late brother played in the resident band at Jersey's Springfield Ballroom, The Rob Charles Combo, and was present when The Beatles played there in 1963, during the period when George was using the Maton. The Beatles didn't bring any amps with them, and so George played through my brother's new Fender Super for the gig, which apparently he loved!

I actually inherited the amp when my brother came back to Surrey and we formed a band with me on guitar and him on Hammond organ. Eventually the speakers blew and we converted the amp into a head instead – sacrilege in hindsight of course, but it was the 60s and that's how we did things back then!

I kept using the amp in its head form until the early 70s – including a year I spent playing with Brian Poole, former frontman of 60s beat group The Tremeloes – before finally trading it in for a new Fender Deluxe Reverb. I often wonder what happened to it!

Terry Page, via email

TGM **What a fantastic story Terry, and how brilliant it must have been for your brother to see George on stage, playing through his amp. We're trying not to dwell too much on the thought of you taking a golden-era Fender combo played by a Beatle and turning it into a head, but enjoy your Overdrive strap all the same. In the unlikely event that anyone thinks they've come across Terry's modified brown Super, please get in touch!**

THE GRAIL QUEST

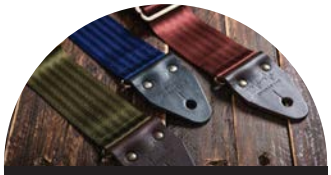
Dear TGM, for a long time now I've been the guitarist in a function band, but after years of making do, I'm now on the search for what I think is my holy grail guitar. I don't have a specific make or brand in mind, but I know what it needs to be – namely, a single-cut with a fast, thin, flat neck.

I mainly play clean, so something with pickups that can give me that sweet, singing tone, but still with a fretboard that's fast enough to let rip on. Can you think of any guitars that might fit the bill?

Steve Paterson, via email

TGM **An interesting dilemma, Steve. Many single-cuts out there tend to have chunky necks and ballsy pickups, but you do have a few options. Inevitably, the more metal-focused guitar companies are more likely to cater for your neck needs than the heritage brands, and the ESP LTD EC-1000 Fluence has relatively classic single-cut looks, but with a 350mm/13.7-inch 'board radius, 24 extra-jumbo frets and Fishman's active Fluence humbucking pickups, which should ensure that your cleans are as crystal clear as you need them to be. You can pick it up in Vintage Black for less than £750.**

Alternatively, if you can stretch your budget into high-end territory, Vigier's GV Rock (£2,769) is a highly-evolved take on the single-cut formula with a supremely playable neck and a mixture of power and clarity. Good luck with the search!



WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you win an Overdrive Straps Seatbelt Strap worth £35*! The hand-made classic guitar strap made from the strongest safety belt material, with full-grain belting leather on the tips. * For more information, visit www.overdrivestraps.com

LOTM prize is subject to availability and may change

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us via snail mail, ***The Guitar Magazine***, BandLab UK Limited, Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL or email **editors@guitar.com**. Alternatively, get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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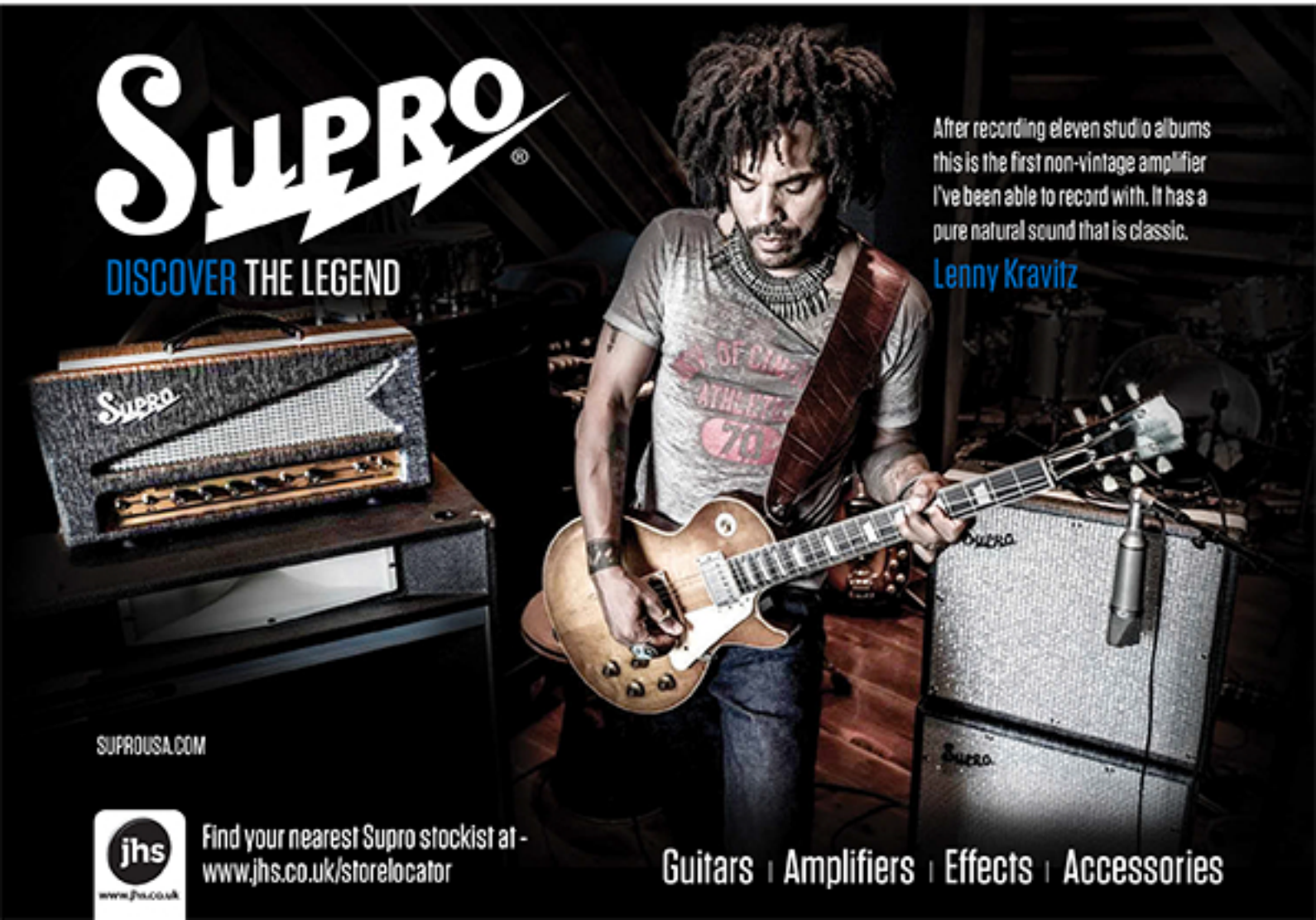


New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases

Kurt Vile
Bottle It In

Kurt Vile has always been an artist determined to do things his own way, and not worry about album sales or critical recognition. But his sixth album, 2015's *B'lieve I'm Goin Down* brought him a great deal of both, in no small part due to the chart-topping success of the sublimely catchy *Pretty Pimpin'*. In crafting his follow-up, however, the Jaguar-loving Philidelphian hasn't rushed things, instead recharging his energies with other projects, not least last year's album with Courtney Barnett, *Lotta Sea Lice,* which found it onto scores of 2017 best-of lists.

Bottle It In comes with a healthy dose of expectation, then – being described as "one of great contemporary American songwriters" will do that – but the former The War On Drugs guitarist has risen to it by creating perhaps his most interesting album yet.

From the outset it's clear that this is going to be a little different, thanks to the unmistakable warble of a talk box that opens *Loading Zones*. It doesn't waste time in reassuring us that this is very much a Kurt Vile record, however – a descending scallic acoustic run leading into a layered strummed verse, complete with Vile's trademark languid, stoner vocals.

This theme of blending the acoustic-driven Americana Vile is known for with more layers, more instrumentation and more pleasingly retro weirdness, continues throughout the album. The appropriately titled *Bassackwards* is one of the album's most compelling and catchy tracks, and effortlessly blends a delicate looped acoustic part, with a jarring reverse-echo effect that slashes across the soundscape.

Elsewhere, *Check Baby* melds flabby synth bass with a processed beat and ice-pick clean guitar to create a track that drips in both stripped-back menace and pounding groove, while *Mutinies* takes a simple acoustic arpeggio and propels it into an otherworldly, dreamy fugue thanks to a stuttering, irregular time signature.

In many ways *Bottle It In* reflects the globe-trotting existence that the success of Vile's last two albums has necessitated. It feels like an album about expanding your horizons – while at the same time holding fast to what made you special in the first place. That's why in among all the harps, synths, piano, banjos, glockenspiels and other esoteric instruments, Vile's fabulously inventive guitar playing is the constant and most vital companion, as he takes us on an epic sonic adventure. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Neil Young, Kevin Morby, The War On Drugs*

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

Richard Ashcroft
NATURAL REBEL

Fans of the former Verve frontman's solo output might have been a bit perturbed by the poppy, electronic bent of 2016's *These People*. But they should be reassured somewhat by the bluesy Strat riff that powers *Natural Rebel*'s 80s country-rock-aping opener, *All My Dreams*, and things are kept on a Nashville course with *Birds Fly*, and its tasty pedal-steel licks. But the album really kicks off with its fourth track, *That's How Strong* – an emotive ballad backed up by powerful, soaring strings… stop us if you've heard this before. Immediately, however, it's clear that Ashcroft isn't content to retread old glories, diving straight into the funky blues of *Born To Be Strangers*, with its incongruously sampled-sounding beat. The plaintive blues of *We All Bleed* is a much stronger moment, however, with Ashcroft's whisky-soaked vocals, and accompanied by some delicate, Stonesy guitar lines. "For me this is my strongest set of songs to date," says Ashcroft of *Natural Rebel*. We wouldn't go quite that far, but this is a much more successful stylistic diversion than some of his recent work. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Verve, Beady Eye*

Tides of Man
EVERY NOTHING

If 2014's *Young And Courageous* felt like the Floridian prog rockers flirting with the instrumental genre, then *Every Nothing* feels like a full-on commitment. The opening track *Static Hymn* sets the dark and brooding ambience that is a feature throughout, with its dreamy, textured sounds that meticulously and melodiously build before climaxing with a huge post-rock guitar crescendo. *New Futures* provides some interesting percussive and industrial soundscapes peppered with slick, syncopated guitar; a stark contrast to *Old 88* with its shoegaze feel that finally explodes into a grungy play-out. There's a cinematic influence all over the album and none more so than *Far Off* – a short, simple track that's beautifully produced and screaming out for a visual accompaniment. This album is full of complex rhythms and huge 90s-influenced guitar sounds – all awash with wonderfully layered soundscapes. Overall, *Every Nothing* is a thoroughly enjoyable journey with a band who are rapidly finding their feet and developing their very own brand of cinematic, grungy post-rock. **DC**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Fierce & The Dead*

This Will Destroy You
NEW OTHERS PART ONE

Escaping from the shadow of genre and state cohorts Explosions In The Sky has been an effortless task for This Will Destroy You. An ever-shifting exploration of sound has seen the Texas quartet welcome in elements of doom, ambient and electronic, creating a sound that has elevated their status in the world of post-rock, and in many ways, transcended it. Such incorrigible curiosity keeps TWDY at the forefront of the genre, but like 2014's *Another Language*, *New Others Part One* never truly realises what it sets out to be. Openers *Melted Jubilee* and *To Win Somebody's Got To Lose* feel totally out of place with the rest of the record; so much so that their appearance is all but forgotten in the embers of stellar final track *Go Away Closer*. It's still peppered with experimental streaks (*Like This*), ambient interludes (*Allegiance*) and avalanches of sound (*Syncage* and *Weeping Window*), but on an album that clocks in at 38-minutes long, this particularly endeavour feels rather unfinished. **BL**

8/10

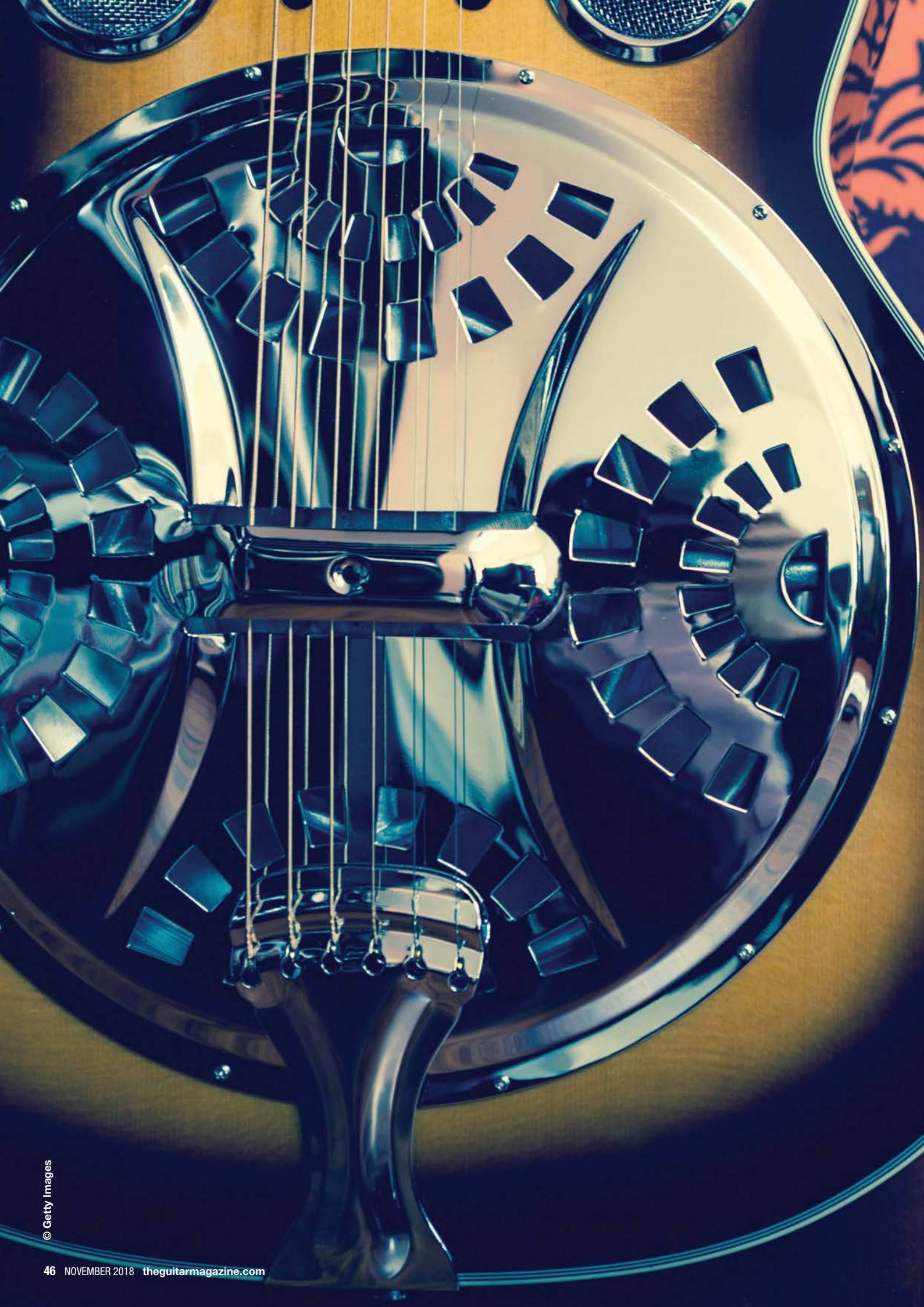
TRY IF YOU LIKE *Caspian, Explosions In The Sky*

ALSO OUT THIS MONTH

Our pick of the best of this month's other guitar releases…

Bert Jansch
JUST A SIMPLE SOUL
A wonderful 39-track 'best of' tribute to the legendary acoustic maestro, compiled by former Suede guitarist Bernard Butler and Bert's estate

Idles
JOY AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE
Bristol punk-rockers bring range and honesty to bear with laser-focused precision on 21st century Britain for their second full-length record



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SLIDE SCHOOL

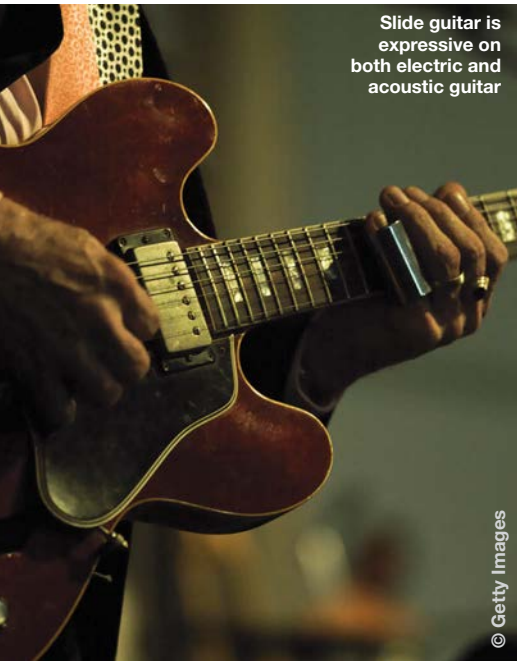
It's one of the most evocative, expressive and downright cool guitar styles around. But how many of us have sat listening to the likes of Robert Johnson, Sonny Landreth, Jerry Douglas or Ben Harper and thought, "I wish I could do that", but never actually tried to learn? Happily, UK slide maestro Chris Eaton is here to give you the basics you need to get started. So raise your action, pick up your slide, and dive in...

Slide guitar is very much an American tradition, and when you play slide – especially on an acoustic instrument – it's hard not to sound American. Slide tones are so often heard in this context – on a film or TV soundtrack during a desert scene with a rattlesnake slithering past, for example. There is of course, the equally rich tradition of slide in Indian classical music, but in the Western guitar tradition, there are three primary styles: bottleneck, Dobro and Weissenborn. But which came first? Let's take a look at the origins of slide guitar...

In 1889, Hawaiian guitarist Joseph Kekuku accidentally discovered lap-slide guitar (also called 'steel guitar', due to the steel bar held in the left hand). Joseph was walking

© Getty Images

Finger and thumb picks are commonly used by slide guitarists who play lap-style



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Slide guitar is expressive on both electric and acoustic guitar

along a railway track with his guitar when he found a metal bolt on the ground. As he picked up the bolt, it hit the strings, making a sound that caught his ear. He developed that sound into a whole style of playing, and then in 1919, started touring Europe with the Bird Of Paradise show, which exposed the sound of Hawaiian lap-steel guitar to the world.

On the other side of the globe, however, there was a parallel tradition. The berimbau is a one-stringed instrument common in West Africa, which is played by sliding a stick along the string to alter the pitch while a gourd resonates the sound. The slave trade saw this concept make its way across the Atlantic, and in the Southern States – the Mississippi Delta especially – it evolved into what became known as a 'diddley bow' or 'jitterbug'. The diddley bow's single string was often attached to the wall of a wooden shack and an object would be used to slide along the string and pick out simple blues melodies. As the acoustic guitar became more common, it isn't much of a leap to imagine players of the diddley bow starting to experiment by sliding objects, such as bones or knives, along their guitar strings.

AN OBJECT WOULD BE USED TO SLIDE ALONG A DIDDLEY BOW'S SINGLE STRING

Over the page, we pick out three prominent acoustic slide guitar styles for you to try out, complete with basic gear, technique and tuning advice to get you started. If electric slide is more your thing, however, turn to p54 for slide aficionado Ariel Posen's top tips...

From the mind of Ryan Adams comes a new guitar utility with more tricks up its sleeve than a 1980s supervillain. The DEFCON4 works as a preamp and EQ to meticulously craft your guitar's sound. Bring peace time to your tone and avoid tedious amp tweaking during a set by using the DEFCON4 to easily switch from single coil to humbucking instruments with a quick twist of the rotary knobs. When the Launch switch is engaged, go into DEFCON 1 and activate a searing boost for your guitar.

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BOTTLENECK

Although an actual bottleneck is rarely used to play it these days, this term is still applied to describe playing slide guitar on a regular six-string instead of a lap-style instrument, and it's the most prevalent method of slide guitar playing. It began with players who have become legends of the blues, such as Blind Willie Johnson, Bukka White, Son House and Robert Johnson. Interestingly, NASA found Blind Willie Johnson's playing so moving, they chose his song *Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground* for the 'Golden Record' that was sent into deep space on the Voyager mission in 1977. Scientist Carl Sagan said the song was chosen because, "Johnson's song concerns a situation he would have faced many times: nightfall with no place to sleep. Since humans appeared on Earth, the shroud of night has yet to fall without touching a man or woman in the same plight."

KEY QUESTIONS

One of the key words to consider when learning slide is 'application'. Where exactly in a live situation will you be using slide? Is it a solo acoustic gig? Do you need to play standard rhythm parts as well as slide licks? Are you the only guitarist in the band? All these questions influence the best approach to take when considering the techniques covered in this feature.

Remember, too, that learning to play slide guitar styles does have a steep curve. Some players get put off due to the challenges involved: the trickiest being right-hand muting – muting unwanted strings using the palm or fingers of your right hand. If you have a spare guitar that can be dedicated to slide, it will make things easier. If not, you might need to compromise in some areas, but don't let that put you off.

LOWS & HIGHS

Acoustic slide uses lower tunings than normal – this means you can use heavier string gauges. Doing this helps achieve a good tone, attack and intonation. 0.014 to 0.059 or 0.015 to 0.056 sets are easily found online.

Sonny Landreth has played a huge part in evolving the bottleneck guitar style

© Getty Images

PLAYERS TO HEAR: BOTTLENECK

ROY ROGERS & THE DELTA RHYTHM KINGS John Lee Hooker's producer and guitarist
MARTIN SIMPSON Legendary English folk troubadour
MICHAEL MESSER UK blues artist and designer of his own resonator range
SONNY LANDRETH The Louisianan slide master who has reinvented the bottleneck vocabulary
PAPA GEORGE London-based bluesman

THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

The other important thing you'll need to consider is the slide itself. Glass slide costs vary – a starter slide will only cost you a few quid, but even a custom slide won't break the bank. We've had great success with Diamond Bottlenecks (diamondbottlenecks.com) – they produce beautiful custom glass slides, and their staff are great at helping you find the best fit for your finger.

LEARNING SLIDE DOES HAVE A STEEP CURVE, BUT DON'T LET THAT PUT YOU OFF!

Using heavy strings might be sufficient to give you tighter string tension and allow for better purchase with the slide. If not, you can experiment with raising your action. A shim of an old credit card placed under the saddle or under the nut is one method. It's also possible to buy an extension nut to slip over your existing one and raise the action up very high; but remember, this will mean not being able to fret at all. Bottleneck playing usually combines slide licks and fretted rhythm playing, so nut extenders are more useful for converting a round-neck guitar into a lap-slide instrument.

Only you can tell which finger is the right one for you – it's all about comfort and there are no right or wrong answers, but generally players use the fourth or third fingers.

We prefer the fourth, as it leaves your first three fingers free to fret as normal, and we'd recommend finding a slide with a snug fit and a medium weight. If it's too heavy, it'll feel cumbersome, too light and you'll struggle to produce sustain and tone.

To aid right-hand attack, some players use thumb and fingerpicks, but these can take a bit of getting used to. For beginners, we'd advise just sticking to thumb and fingers, as this can detract from string muting, which is a crucial technique for controlling unwanted sound. Another common technique is to wear fake nails made from strong acrylic on the thumb and first three fingers, which really helps with tone and volume.

TUNINGS TO TRY: BOTTLENECK

STANDARD (EADGBE)
Good for slipping in a few slide licks within your regular playing, but it's much more challenging when it comes to string muting, and can be very unforgiving. Open tunings are more sympathetic

OPEN D (DADF♯AD)
Open D is the acoustic equivalent of open E, used to great effect on electric by the likes of Chris Rea. This type of tuning, regardless of the pitch, is often called Vestapol tuning

OPEN G (DGDGBD)
With open G tuning, the middle strings remain the same as standard tuning, which helps provide some familiarity for navigation

DOBRO

'Dobro' is actually the name of a brand of resonator guitars, which is currently owned by Gibson. But like Hoover, Velcro, Tannoy and the like, its success and popularity has led to it becoming the generic term for the product type, regardless of the manufacturer.

The word 'Dobro' is itself a portmanteau of the words 'Dopyera' and 'Brothers'. The Dopyera brothers were Slovakian instrument makers who invented the resonator in order to increase the volume of acoustic guitars in the days before electrification and amplification. The body acts as a speaker cabinet and an aluminium cone acts as the speaker.

For the purposes of this article, when we talk about dobros, we're referring to square-necked resonator instruments, which can only be played on your lap. They have wooden bodies and a spider-style bridge, with the cone facing outwards – unlike metal resonator guitars, which have biscuit bridges, or tri-cones, where the cones are turned upside down and face inwards towards the back of the body. These approaches produce a different tone to spider bridges.

RAISING THE BAR

The dobro will always be associated with country and western or bluegrass music, in the same way that metal-body resonators will forever be linked to the blues. With very high string action and the use of a heavy steel slide known as a bar, lap-steel instruments are the best way to produce slide tone, as there's no danger of banging your slide on the frets and having to develop a light touch. However, the tradeoff is that you can only play slide on these guitars; no fretted notes are possible. In that sense, it's 50 per cent a different instrument to bottleneck guitar. Your right hand moves in the same way, but not your left.

To develop a clean technique, you'll need to practise right-hand muting, which is also known as 'string blocking'. Mastering this while wearing finger and thumb picks takes some time. Palm muting is also used to help control your sound. The ability to play perfectly in tune is the thing that separates players. Be aware that the transition from bottleneck to lap slide can be very challenging, and just learning how to play in tune can take hours of practice!

ESSENTIAL TOOLS

If you're after a starter square-neck dobro, the likes of Gretsch, Epiphone and Washburn all offer guitars that are sub-£500, but finding a really good quality example in the UK isn't easy. One option is Gold Tone, which works with resonator specialist Paul Beard to produce more affordable versions of his world-renowned designs.

TUNINGS TO TRY: DOBRO

HIGH-BASS G (GBDGBD)
Not to be confused with the open G tuning used for bottleneck, this is the standard tuning for dobros, and offers two octaves of a major triad. The bass strings mirror the treble ones, so whatever you play on the first three strings can be repeated on the bottom three. Capos are often used, for example, at the 2nd fret when the song is in the key of A

OPEN D (DADF♯AD)
This is another popular dobro tuning, which is useful for self-accompanied arrangements due to the low root note

The standard strings used on a dobro are 0.016 to 0.056 phosphor-bronze, and these are easily available online. The other bit of kit you'll need is of course a tone bar. Tone bars come in two different shapes; a Stevens bar, which has grooves running along the top and sides to help grip it, and bullet bars, which have round ends and are more commonly used for electric lap-steel and pedal-steel guitar.

Jerry Douglas has done a huge amount to popularise dobro guitar playing in his Grammy-winning career

© Getty Images

PLAYERS TO HEAR: DOBRO

JERRY DOUGLAS The best-known dobro player in the world, who has played a huge part in popularising the instrument. He's a 14-time Grammy winner and a session player on more than 1,500 albums
ROB ICKES A virtuoso player from the US bluegrass scene
MIKE AULDRIDGE The late master who inspired so many to learn the instrument
MIKE WITCHER, ANDY HALL, JAMES CHURCH AND JOSH SWIFT Key players from the new generation of sliders
PHILIP HENRY AND NOEL DASHWOOD UK dobroists currently touring on the folk scene

WEISSENBORN

Before the Dopyera brothers started producing their resonators in 1928, Hermann Weissenborn was already selling his beautiful koa-wood slide guitars, which proved popular at the time, due to the Hawaiian music boom initiated by Joseph Kekuku. Mr Weissenborn was born in Germany in 1863 and moved to America in 1902. Today, people still use his surname to describe Weissenborn-style guitars made by various manufacturers. In the UK, we have our very own specialist manufacturer; Anderwood Guitars, based in Dorset. The unique selling point of a Weissenborn is its hollow neck. This creates a bigger sound chamber than regular acoustic guitars and helps produce their signature mellow, woody tone.

BARE NECESSITIES

Playing techniques when using a Weissenborn are very similar to those of the dobro or lap steel, but on the whole, more players use their bare fingers to play, as opposed to using thumb and fingerpicks. Open D or low-C Vestapol are popular tunings, with a set of 0.013s or 0.014s as standard. Again, right-hand string blocking/muting is the key to achieving a clean, controlled sound.

TUNINGS TO TRY: WEISSENBORN

OPEN D (DADF♯AD)
As with the dobro-style, the low root note makes this a great tuning for self-accompaniment

LOW C VESTAPOL (CGCEGC)
As the inclusion of the 'Vestapol' name suggests, this is effectively open D tuned a whole step lower

Ben Harper has made the Weissenborn a key part of his rootsy musical recipe

PLAYERS TO HEAR: WEISSENBORN

BEN HARPER Grammy-award-winning roots artist
MARTIN HARLEY The UK's very own virtuoso Weissenborn exponent
DAVID LINDLEY Long-time Jackson Browne collaborator
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ARIEL POSEN'S FIVE TIPS FOR SLIDE TONE & FEEL

Through his work with The Bros Landreth and now as a solo artist Ariel Posen has earned a reputation as one of the world's hottest electric slide guitar players. Here he shares his top five tips for getting better tone and feel for electrified slide guitar...

1. CHOOSE THE RIGHT SLIDE

"The kind of slide we decide to use is much more of a personal preference than something mandatory. Whether it's brass, nickel, ceramic or glass, your choice will result in a different sound and feel. I love the warmth that glass gives, but there's something special and aggressive I get from brass, and that's why I use it. It's good to try as many as you can, so you can find the one that suits your sound and your playing the best.

"It's also vitally important to choose a finger that feels most comfortable for you. Lots of players use their pinky, ring finger or even middle finger. I've always played on my pinky because that felt more natural to me, and I really like having my three other fingers available to use behind the slide. The same approach (minus one spare finger) can be achieved with the slide on your ring finger, but not as much when you're sliding with your middle finger.

"The next important thing to consider is to make sure you find a slide that fits your finger properly. Too many people pick up a slide that ends up being way too big or too tight; they struggle playing with it, obviously, then toss it away never to be played again. You need to spend time finding a slide that fits well, as everyone's finger sizes differ. I always say a slide should feel like a glove, or an extension of the finger. Most importantly, it shouldn't feel like you're changing anything too much when you put it on."

2. RAISE YOUR ACTION

"This one should be a no-brainer. The higher you set the action of your strings, the more sustain and resonance you're going to get from the slide. It's all-too-easy to 'fret out' when your action is low, because the strings can't handle the weight of the slide pushing down on them.

"Raising your action might feel strange at first, especially if you're still doing some playing without the slide. There'll be an inevitable period of adjustment, but you won't look back once you get used to it. If you're able to, I suggest devoting one guitar to being your dedicated instrument for slide, which you can keep in whichever tuning you like and have higher action."

3. USE HEAVIER STRINGS

"Continuing on from higher action and having a devoted slide guitar, I suggest throwing some heavier gauge strings on it. Lots of people, myself included, use various different tunings such as DADGAD, open D, open C, and so on. When you start tuning down so low, the strings get loose and don't handle those low tunings as well. If you're primarily playing in standard tuning or open E, then you shouldn't have to go higher than 0.011s.

"Assuming your action is raised, you should still be able to get a lot of sustain from those tunings. If you're moving lower to D or C, I highly recommend heavier-gauge strings. Don't be shy to go as heavy as 0.014s or 0.016s. You'll be surprised how, even though they're gigantic relative to your normal string-gauge choice, they're still fairly comfortable to play, because you're matching the tension with the tuning. Slide really likes heavier strings – your sound instantly becomes bigger and warmer, if that's what you're going for.

"Heavier strings with higher action will immediately make your slide journey easier. Remember that slide is supposed to be an emotive experience, and these steps just make it easier to fully engage that."

4. WORK ON YOUR RIGHT HAND

"There's a common misconception that slide players mute with the left hand. The truth is that all of your muting comes from your right hand. Whether you want to play with a pick or your fingers, that's up to you, but it's the fingers close to the string that you strike that prove to be very important in muting the strings you don't want to hear. I usually play with my fingers when I play slide, because I like the warmer tone I get with the slide as opposed to a pick. Whenever I'm striking a note, whether it's with my index or middle finger, I'm essentially 'sandwiching' the strings around it. For example, if I'm striking the second (B) string with my index finger, then my thumb and middle finger are muting the third (G) and first (E) string. This ensures there aren't any extra notes that I don't want being heard.

"This technique is the same for any note or string you're playing. It's something that has to become second nature – a thing that you just

> "THE HIGHER YOU SET THE ACTION, THE MORE SUSTAIN AND RESONANCE YOU'LL GET"

© Getty Images

"HAVE THE ATTACK FROM THE RIGHT HAND, AND KEEP YOUR SLIDE HAND SOFT"

'do'. Another common tendency people have is to press down hard on the fretboard for a more aggressive sound. I always encourage people to have all the attack and power from the right hand, but keep the slide hand soft and only dig in if they really feel like the part calls for it. I find the overall tone from consciously adopting this approach gives you much more control over your dynamics."

5. GET THE RIGHT GEAR

"For any playing style, gear is what makes us inspired and helps us get the exact sound in our head out into the world. For slide, it's really up to you what you want to use. There is no 'right' guitar or amp combination that will transport you to that magical place in your mind. It's actually all about what gets you fired up when you throw your guitar on and flick the standby switch off.

"My personal preference is an amp with headroom. I like loud amps, 50 watts or higher. Not that I don't have love for the low-wattage selections, but in a band or live setting, I need that clean room to make sure my sound doesn't top out too early. Headroom helps with sustain and resonance, especially if you start hitting it with overdrive or boost. Lots of slide players tend to use compressors, as they help add sustain on top of what you might already have going.

"With regard to the sound of the guitar, there are no rules about whether you should be playing slide with single-coil pickups or humbuckers. Just like the slides themselves, pickups are just different flavours. Again, I can't stress enough that it's so important for you to mess around with different combinations, to find what works for you. Keep an open mind, and have fun while finding your sound. Remember that it's easy to sound like other people, but it's hard to find your own voice. Make it your own – find the sound that makes you play better, stick with it, and dive deeper in!"

Ariel Posen's solo single, *Fade*, is out now. Visit www.arielposen.com to find out more

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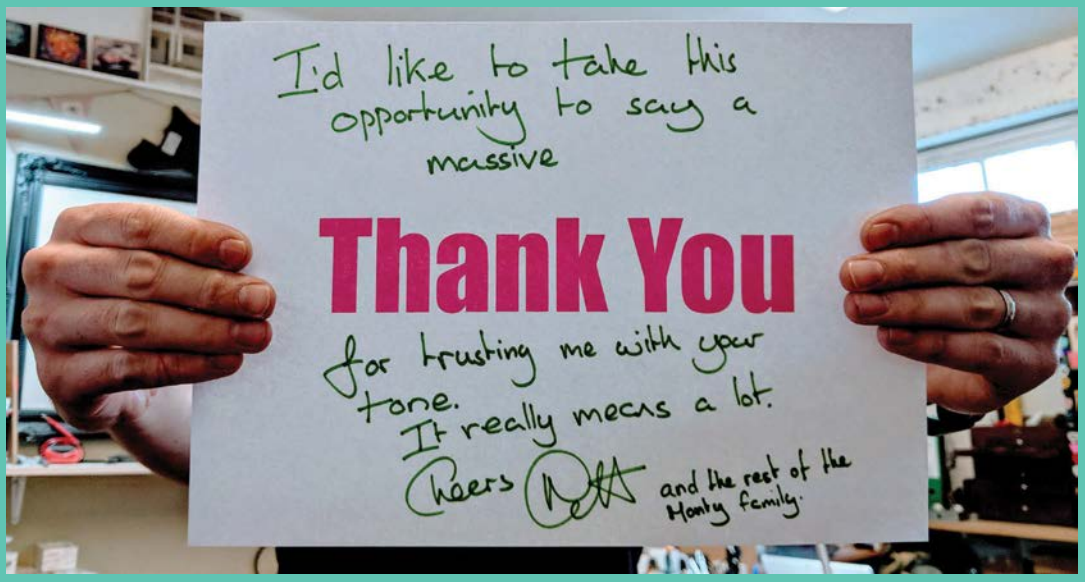

GUITAR TINKERERS EXTRAORDINAIRE

STRANGER THINGS

Phoebe Bridgers' debut LP, *Stranger In The Alps*, was one of 2017's best albums and it signalled the arrival of a remarkable new musical talent. Josh Gardner sat down with the 24-year-old Angeleno to talk baritone guitars, keeping it independent, and having fun with pretentious guitar nerds...

PORTRAITS ELEANOR JANE

You'd be forgiven for wondering if someone who sings, 'Jesus Christ I'm so blue all the time' might not be the most light-hearted interview subject, but Phoebe Bridgers couldn't be more accommodating – especially given the circumstances. Things are running rather dramatically behind schedule at Bristol's Thekla, and at a time when most artists would prefer to be relaxing backstage, Bridgers happily sacrifices her downtime to chat with us, right until the moment the venue manager insists that the hundreds of punters outside can't wait in the muggy summer drizzle any longer.

Bridgers' debut, *Stranger In The Alps*, showcases a rare talent blessed with a sharp wit and a knack for insightful lyrical observations far beyond her 24 years. As we chat, it's easy to understand what's led the likes of Ryan Adams, Conor Oberst and Julien Baker to collaborate with the Los Angeles native – and why the sky really is the limit for what she can achieve...

CALI GIRL

Bridgers' passion for music started early, but it didn't take long for her to decide what she really wanted. "My mom was a really big music fan, so she forced me to take piano lessons when I was a kid, and I hated it – so I started taking guitar lessons instead!" she chuckles. "But she was still super supportive."

"Growing up in LA is a very interesting place for a musician. You get a lot of opportunities, and it's a very privileged position. Because who the fuck gets to a free arts high school that's like, 40 minutes from their house!?"

DANELECTRO

That school was the LA County High School For The Arts – a prestigious non-private institution that specialises in music, theatre, dance and the visual arts – that's fostered the talent of the likes of Josh Groban, Christina Milian, and all three Haim sisters. "It was *exactly* like *Fame*," Phoebe laughs when we query if it bore any similarities to the 1980 musical film. "Except that the kids who sing musical theatre in the hallways are the most annoying ones, and nobody fucking talks to them!"

It's safe to say that, while Bridgers was there to sing, she wasn't cracking out showtunes in the corridors...

"I wanted to go to the school for voice, but only because I wanted to be a musician," she affirms. "It was never a classically-trained situation. I just wanted to be around kids who loved music. So I did that, and then my mom let me not go to college, and try to do music! But I was writing songs and playing in bands that whole time."

"I DIDN'T WANT A LABEL TO TRY TO DEVELOP ME – I WANTED THEM TO LIKE WHAT I WAS DOING"

It was while gigging around LA that Bridgers was spotted and tapped up to sing on a cover of the Pixies' *Gigantic* for Apple's 2014 iPhone advert, in which she also appeared. You'd assume that being seen and heard by untold millions of people around the world would be a big help to your career, but apparently not in the way you might expect: "It opened doors," she deadpans. "It opened doors in the sense that I was able to not work at Starbucks... so that was cool!"

While Phoebe always wanted to be a musician, the plan wasn't always to be a solo artist – she played in bands throughout her teens and ended up playing solo by necessity, as much as anything else.

"My band dropped out of high-school to be in a band that I love, called Kitten – like, all of them!" she exclaims. "They all got to go on tour, and I had to stay home and finish high school – because it scared the shit out of me not to – so I started playing solo shows. I played the same fuckin' bar/coffee shop called Room 5 every week, and begged my friends to come! And that was what I was doing when I met Ryan Adams."

PAX IT IN

Adams is a significant figure in Bridgers' career to date. The Grammy-nominated guitarist championed Bridgers as an artist when she first emerged – describing her as "a musical unicorn who could make a jar of sand sound like *Blood On The Tracks*", recording her first EP, *Killer*, and releasing it through his record label, Pax-Am.

"Marshall [Vore], who now plays drums with me, was playing with Ryan," Bridgers explains of how the two first crossed paths. "Marshall had heard me play, and asked me to open for his band, Olin & The Moon, at the Bootleg Theatre in LA. Then later I met Ryan at his studio, through Marshall, and he recorded my seven-inch. I recorded the three songs at Pax-Am [Adams' studio], it took us about an hour. I played his Harmony Buck Owens guitar."

When it came to recording her debut long-player, however, Bridgers' independent streak saw her decide to go it alone – so much so that she didn't even have a record label until it was finished.

"I made my record, and sold it to whoever liked it the most, which I'm so glad I did," she enthuses. "Because I had no idea what my music was going to sound like. And I still kinda work like that – my songs don't really flesh out until I record them.

"I consider myself a producer, really. What sells a song to me is the way that it's portrayed. So like, tonight, for the first time ever I'm going to play this song that I recorded with Lucy Dacus and Julien Baker [aka indie-rock supergroup Boygenius – Ed]. I've had it forever, but I couldn't really play it live until we recorded it, because the elements come together, and then I sort of teach it to my band. Even if they recorded on it, which they did, we don't figure it out until we're recording. We're not

SUCK
MY
DICK

the sort of band that will break out a new song when we're on tour, because it has to be arranged properly.

"So I didn't want to sign with a label that was trying to 'develop' me or anything – I wanted them to like what I was doing and not be disappointed with the final product. I love my label. I feel like the boss of my thing, and I don't have stressful label conversations – it's the dream!"

STEELY DANO

Listening to *Stranger In The Alps* the delicate, reverb-drenched guitar work produced by Bridgers and her superb sideman, Harrison Whitford, leaps out as something altogether more interesting and exciting than the standard singer-songwriter fare, yet Bridgers is modest to a fault about her guitar-playing abilities.

"I'm still getting comfortable with it," she says of playing guitar. "At first it was just a vehicle for writing songs. I knew about nine chords, probably, for the first five years of playing! I have this really horrible habit of writing the same song 15 times – like if I discover a new tuning or a new chord, I'll write a song and then realise it's the exact same format as the past 10 I was writing! So I'm still finding my style, but I love – *love* – open-tuned baritone guitar. It's perfect for how I write – it makes everything sound so sad! But it takes it out of the singer-songwriter world."

"OPEN-TUNED BARITONE IS PERFECT FOR HOW I WRITE – IT MAKES EVERYTHING SOUND SO SAD!"

The aforementioned baritone – specifically a black-sparkle Danelectro 56 – is a huge part of *Stranger In The Alps*' remarkable sonic brew, and has become something of a calling card for Bridgers ever since, but her discovery of the charms of longer-scale instruments was a happy accident.

"I was recording a song called *Chelsea* on the album with Tony Berg, who's a producer I trust with my whole soul," Bridgers recalls. "The best thing about his tiny little fuckin' studio is that it has this really specific sound... because you're not suppose to have 80 fuckin' thousand instruments on the wall in your vocal room, resonating! But I love it, and it brings character.

"So we're recording and he just pulls one of those instruments off the wall and hands it to me – and it's a baritone. Because up until this point, I think because the way that my voice is and the chord shapes that I like, I'd been tuning a fuckin' acoustic guitar to C♯! It was brutal! But he handed me this baritone and the sound was just amazing.

"When we finished recording, I bought the exact same guitar that I'd recorded with. It was like, $300, but I paid $500 because they had one that was sparkly and I wanted it so bad! But I'm so glad I did, because it's paid itself off like 10 trillion times! Although when you rattle it, it's like... yeah that's old!"

SERVICE WITH A SMILE

That Dano was clearly money well spent, then, but Phoebe reveals that it almost didn't happen, thanks to some startlingly poor customer service on the part of some LA guitar store employees...

"This sounds like a made up story, but it's true," Bridgers says animatedly. "I drove to a guitar store – like the nearest one I could find in Venice – to get this guitar. So I walked into the store, and there's one guy on one side of the store, and one guy on the other. So I go over, pick up the guitar, I knew exactly what I wanted, I didn't have any questions... but I'd also been looking for this 60s small-bodied Gibson. They only made a few of them made in black, but for a vintage guitar they're cheap – like $2,500.

"So I was just talking to the sales guys, asking them about this Gibson acoustic I was looking for, and they were trying to tell me that you should only pay 1,500 bucks for one, and that I didn't know what I was talking about, and that they only come in sunburst... all this stuff. But I have this lifehack that I use in these situations. I have this friend, Chris Nelson, who sells vintage instruments, so I was just texting him while this was going on so I could tell them like the year, the model, how much the last one had sold for... all that sort of thing! I just

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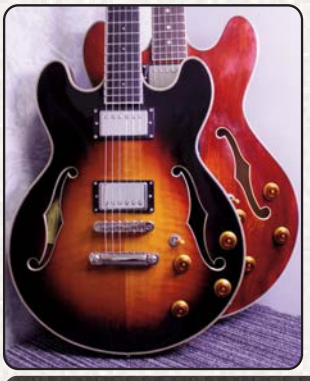

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loved flexing on them because they were being super fucking condescending!

"But *then* out of nowhere, the two dudes start getting in a screaming fight over who gets the commission for my guitar – right in front of me! I let them scream at each other for three minutes and then I said, 'Shut the fuck up! No!' And I made them go away and went and bought it from the owner of the store, but I'm sure they still got paid.

"I really wanted to prove a point and walk out of the store so that neither of them got it, but it had been so hard to find the exact thing I wanted that day, and I really wanted to go home and play it, so I fucking bought it... but I still hate them!"

CHALLENGING PRECONCEPTIONS

Women calling out sexism and discrimination in creative industries is something that has dominated the headlines over the last year or so, and listening to her recount her eyebrow-raising retail experience, we wonder if the guitar world has a fair bit of work to do in that regard, too. Phoebe is unequivocal in her response.

"Dude, it's insane," she insists, rolling her eyes. "My favourite one used to be with my Epiphone Frontier. I used to play that guitar all the time, because Ryan gave to me, and it's a *very* nice guitar. But dudes would be coming up to me at shows like, [disdainful] 'Wow... an Epiphone...'

"My favourite thing is to troll dudes like that. I used to play in this band called Sloppy Jane, and we had the worst amp ever – it was a Peavey from the early 2000s that had beer spilled all over it. But we would insist it was a tube amp, just to watch dudes get hot and bothered and like, SO upset! We'd be like, [deadpan] 'No, no... it's tubes...' [laughs] It was great.

"I feel like if people know my music now, and are a little bit more afraid of me, they wouldn't do that! But I've definitely walked into guitar stores and had people talk directly to my guitar player instead of me when I ask a fuckin' question... but whatever! I don't know much about gear, but I know when I love something, and I know what I'm talking about when I get the balls to talk about something!"

As a case in point, when discussions turn to the other key element of her live guitar sound – a stunning sunburst Collings 01 model – she is quick to extol its virtues.

"I love Collings guitars. I feel like they're the perfect tour guitar – because you can beat the shit out of them, and they're comparable to a vintage guitar in sound and feel," she enthuses. "You shouldn't take vintage guitars on tour... but I did. I took the Epiphone Frontier that Ryan gave me on tour... and it snapped! I fixed it, but I was like, 'Never again!'"

ROAD READY

Since releasing *Stranger In The Alps* last year, Bridgers has been touring relentlessly, both in the US and Europe. And no sooner has she finished her latest European jaunt, she'll hit the road again with Boygenius at the start of November. It's a schedule that doesn't leave much time for writing or recording, but the experience has made her rethink a few things...

"I write on a hundred-dollar classical acoustic – like a child's classical acoustic! Because you can just thrash it, and it's fucking so quiet that nobody can hear me in my tiny apartment. But I love building a thing," she says of her heavily layered, experimental approach to recording. "Maybe I'll explore doing it differently in the future, because I've definitely played these songs long enough now that they're better than they were when I recorded them.

"You can't fuckin' tour an album for a year and then record it, but I think for the next record I'll try to find a blend of playing in the room, and finding an arrangement. My favourite thing ever is still to build and find these sounds in the studio. When I played Eaux Claires festival, I went to April Base, which is Bon Iver's studio. He had a piano with all these pedals attached to it, and it made me write a song in like, C, G, D again – which I'd never do on a guitar!

Pushing the boundaries is clearly something that fascinates Bridgers about making music, and has in turn fuelled her passion for unusual guitars and esoteric effects.

"I like gear because it gets you out of your head and out of your comfort zone," she says as we round up our chat. "Everyone's tastes are different, and my favourite thing would be to be able to plug into everyone's pedalboard ever... and then just explore and write songs."

Phoebe Bridgers' *Stranger In The Alps* is out now on Dead Oceans. Boygenius' self-titled debut EP is out 9 November via Matador

The Danelectro baritone has become Phoebe's go-to instrument

This Collings 01 model subs for her vintage Epiphone Frontier on tour

© Jim White

EAGLE SOAR

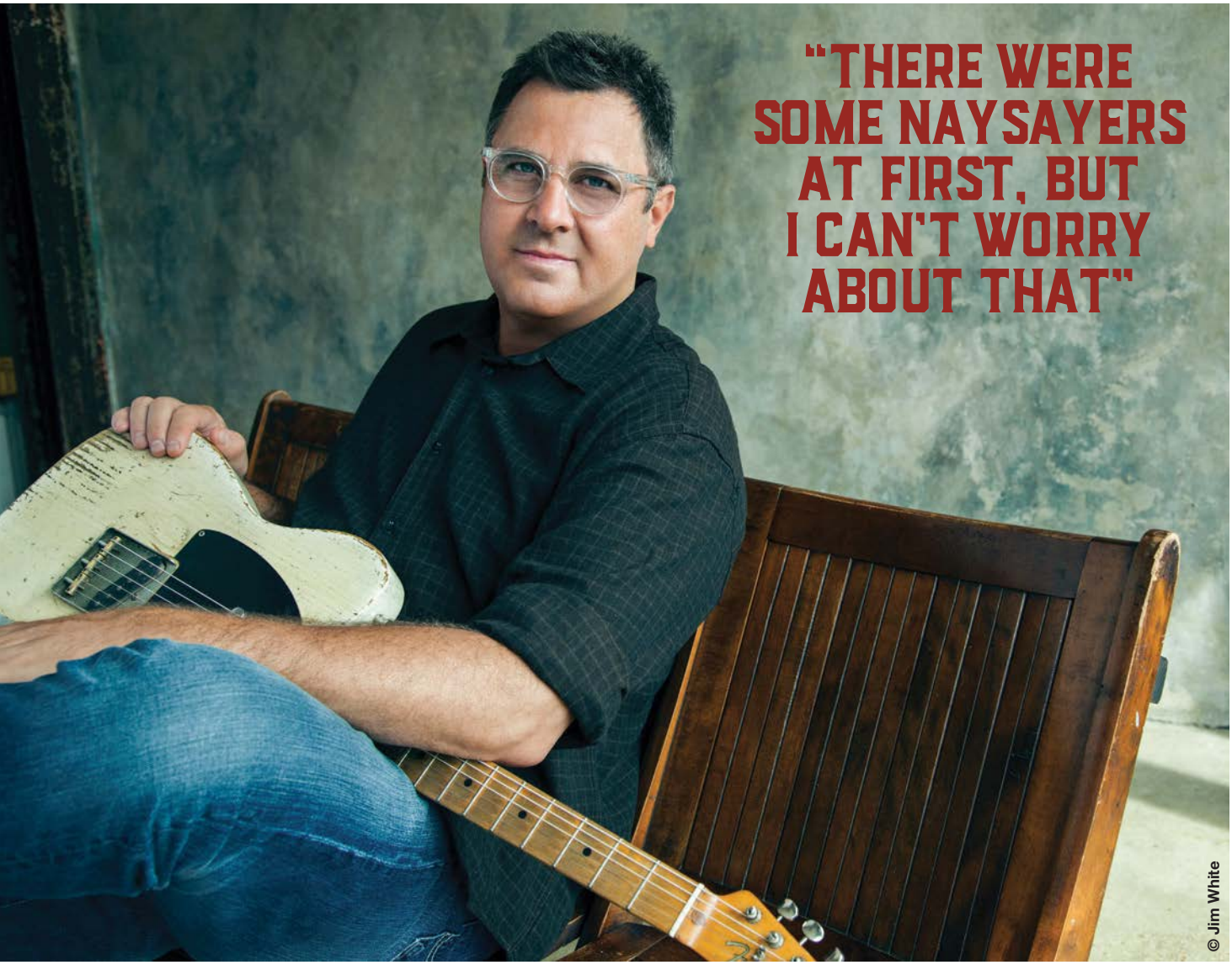
Country superstar Vince Gill has played to packed out audiences all over the globe and has sold more than 20 million albums in his career, but nothing could prepare him for the pressure of stepping into the shoes of the late Glenn Frey with the Eagles...

STORY JOE BOSSO

When Vince Gill accepted the invitation to join the Eagles last year for two shows, he knew that he was stepping into a potential minefield. "Let's face it, the Eagles without Glenn Frey was pretty unthinkable to the band's fans," he says. "As a fan myself, I can understand that. But I never went into this thinking that I was 'replacing' Glenn, if that's the right word – that would be impossible on every level. So I think once fans saw that, they gave me a chance."

The two shows were such resounding successes ("they were beautiful, surreal and emotional") that Don Henley, Joe Walsh and Timothy B Schmit decided to carry on with a full tour with a line-up that included, in addition to Gill, guitarist Steuart Smith and Frey's own son, Deacon, on guitar and vocals.

"They wanted it to be great, and that's something I could deal with," says Gill. That was right up my alley. Being a part of it for over a year now, I can say that I go about things a little differently than the other guys, but this is all about playing what's necessary – and only that much. You're playing songs that are iconic, and you're playing in front of a lot of people that would scratch their heads if they weren't as they remember them. To me, it's quite important to see these songs get performed the way they do. I'm a little more of a free spirit when



I play and sing, but this has been a really great learning experience for me to understand why they do what they do. The songs deserve it."

The Eagles of today are a far cry from the volatile, hard-living country-rock renegades they were in the 70s. "Aren't we all?" Gill laughs. When asked if he would have joined the group back in their hedonistic glory days, the much-honoured guitarist (21 Grammys and counting) turns the question around and answers with characteristic modesty.

"The real question is, 'Would I have been good enough?'" he asks. "And the answer is, 'I don't think so.' I don't think I played and sang back then to have merited being in the Eagles. The level of musicianship is pretty high in this band. It took me a long time to get where I am now, so to me it's 'all things for a reason'. I'm so much better than I was in the early days, and I'm just grateful to have this opportunity. I try to take things moment to moment, and this moment is pretty special."

You've known various members of the Eagles over the years, but how did you come to join the band?

"Yeah, I have known these guys for quite a while. I think I first met them around 1980. After the band broke up, Glenn and I became friends through our mutual manager, a man named Larry Fitzgerald, and his partner, Mark Hartley. They managed Glenn in his solo years. Glenn and I crossed paths quite often. He would come to some of my early gigs and cheer me on, and then he became with obsessed with golf, like me. So we had some things in common.

"There were other connections. I recorded *I Can't Tell You Why* for an Eagles tribute album that they put together – Timothy sang on my version of it. And then Joe and I became friends, and we actually talked about trying to do a Traveling Wilburys kind of band. That would have been fun. I also worked with Don on his *Cass Country* album. After that, Don and I dueted on an Elton John project. There were so many times our lives converged. I did a couple of songs with the band when they were honoured at the Kennedy Center. So after a while, I think everybody sort of said, 'Well, this might be possible...'

"I guess I kind of slipped in there. There were some naysayers at first, and I imagine there always will be. But I can't worry about that – I'd go crazy if I let it get to me. It's been okay. The way they've chosen to go on is by honouring Glenn, and it's been a great experience for everybody."

As a guitar player, what kind of impact did the Eagles have on you back in the day?

"Without question I was an Eagles fan. I loved all of their albums and songs. And I was a Joe Walsh fan, too – I was so into him as a solo artist before he joined the band. Joe had a huge impact on me as a guitar player. Before I became a bluegrass kind of knucklehead, I was playing in garage bands. We did all kinds of rock 'n' roll, and we played *Rocky Mountain Way* and *Funk #49*. I was way into it. [laughs] There's tapes of me playing *Peaceful Easy Feeling* – I must have been about 16 – and I was godawful. I haven't got the courage to play those tapes for anybody. It's hysterical how bad I sounded.

"But as I got older, I understood that the real purpose behind the guitar playing on a lot of those records was to serve the song. It wasn't just somebody out there blowing a bunch of riffs over some changes. All the guitar parts were beautifully thought out, very well composed and unbelievably memorable. So many of those hooks are etched in your memory, and it's unbelievable to play them on

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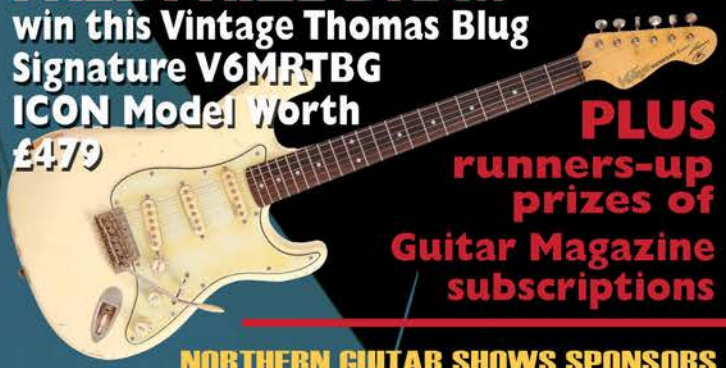

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stage. You know, I'm still a fan. When *Hotel California* starts and the crowd just erupts, I'm smiling every time thinking, 'This is so cool'."

It's interesting that you were a fan of the harder rock songs. One might assume that you were more into the Bernie Leaden era versus something like *Those Shoes*...
"I know people might assume that. What's funny is, as a player, I didn't fall into the country world until later. Like I said, I played rock before. We were trying to be a tough little rock 'n' roll band. As for the Eagles, all of their songs spoke to me. They were just a cut above everything else, and that's what contributed to their longevity. So they have that in common with Hank Williams and Merle Haggard and some of the real giants – a body of incredible work that stands the test of time.

Obviously, an offer to join the Eagles is beyond tempting. But was it a hard decision knowing that you would have to put your solo career on hold?
"Being in the Eagles is a different animal from my solo career or even doing what I do with the Time Jumpers [the Western swing band Vince joined in 2010]. To me, the real beauty of it is I get to honour my pal Glenn. And I think he'd be okay with me being in this band and doing my best to sing and play his songs. So from a spiritual place, it was a no-brainer.

"You know, I've had a nice solo career, but it probably pales in comparison to my career as a sideman. I once tried to count how many records I've appeared on, and I think it's close to 1,000. But I just look at it as helping friends out. As long as they want to have me to play on a record, I'm thrilled be take part."

"I'M STILL A FAN. WHEN HOTEL CALIFORNIA STARTS, I'M SMILING EVERY TIME"

You don't have anything to prove to anyone, but was there any kind of audition for the Eagles – just to make sure you were a good fit?
"There was no 'audition' per se. I don't want to put words in anybody else's mouth – that would be foolish – but Don did say to me once, 'You're really the only guy I thought of'. And that meant a lot to me. I could think of lots of people they could have called. You know, I don't sing like Glenn, and they certainly don't need another guitar player. But I fit in and it's been nice."

You guys do close to 30 songs every night – how much individual rehearsing did you have to do before you got in the room with the band?
"Well, I did quite a bit, but I didn't really know what to learn. It wasn't predetermined what I was going to sing and play; it all kind of evolved. This music is very structured, and a lot of times I'd start playing something, and somebody would say, 'That's not on the record'. And I'd say, 'I know. All the parts are taken.'" [Laughs]

Tell us a little bit about the first show you played with them at Dodger Stadium. You said it was pretty emotional...

"Oh, man, I'm sure it was for everybody – for the crowd, for them. It was emotional for me, too, but it was also a terrifying experience. If anybody was going to take a little heat and suffer some slings and arrows, it was gonna be me – I'm the country guy coming into this iconic rock band. I had a tremendous amount of white noise going on in my head at that Dodger Stadium gig. You should always be a little scared before a show. If you're not, then it doesn't matter to you. And it mattered a lot to me. I wanted to do a great job and make them not regret the decision they made.

"I'll tell you, the funniest thing at that first show was, I'd worn one too many layers of clothes. It was LA and it was hot, and I was sweating so much, it was like I couldn't breathe. Finally, I had to take off this cool-looking leather jacket before I died!"

There are a lot of guitar players on stage in the band – you, Joe Walsh, Steuart Smith, Deacon Frey, and sometimes Don plays guitar as well. Did that cause you to make any kind of changes to your regular guitar rig?

"Yeah, it is a little bit different. I stand on the side of the stage with the Eagles, instead of being in the middle, where I usually am with my own gigs. I'm the one guy who doesn't use in-ear monitors, too. As for guitars, I would just think, 'Okay, what's going to help this song? What's gonna sound right?' So I play a nice variety of everything. I play a lot of Telecaster for my own shows, but I only use it for one or two songs with the Eagles. There's a lot of Les Pauls, and a lot of acoustics for songs like *Peaceful Easy Feeling* and *Lyin' Eyes*. You find what's appropriate. I'm using a lot of the same rig that I normally use, and I'm just trying to play the guitar that I know is going to cast the right glow on the song."

"THESE SONGS HAVE MEANT A LOT TO PEOPLE – YOU WANT TO HONOUR THAT"

So you're still using your Little Walter guitar amps?

"Oh, yes. They sound really good with the Eagles. Everything is crunched a little bit more, especially on songs like *Those Shoes,* for example. The Little Walters rock pretty hard most of the night. Those are just great, versatile amps."

How many guitars are you bringing out with you for the Eagles?

"Probably eight or nine. I've got an Italian Esquire, two Strats, two Les Pauls, two Martin acoustics... I convert one guitar to a five-string – I do an open tuning to get kind of a Keith Richards rhythm. It gives everything a really neat, different sound. I haven't brought a 335 out yet. I just picked up a nice old one, so I might find a spot for it."

Are you using a lot of pedals for this tour?

"Not so much. You play these big places and you don't need a lot of delay or reverb. I use a little bit of compression a couple of overdrive pedals – or distortion pedals. I don't know the difference between an overdrive pedal and a distortion pedal!"

Have you been tempted to play Steuart Smith's double-neck?

"Oh, no. He plays that on *Hotel California*. But no, I haven't picked it up. I wouldn't even know where to turn it on."

Was the lead guitarist in you hankering to play any parts of those legendary *Hotel California* solos?

"Well, that would be fun, but it's not necessary. It's all kind of daunting. To watch what Joe and Steuart do is pretty magical. Steuart's been my friend for 30 years or so. He played on a bunch of my records, and we both played with Rodney Crowell. So I've got a great old friend over there on the other side of the stage. And just because I showed up, it doesn't mean he should change one note about what he's contributed, because he's really magical. He replicates so many parts that Bernie and Don Felder played. He's really something."

As a guitar player, what's been the biggest revelation to you from this experience?

"Well, the thing you have to consider with the Eagles is, this is the furthest thing from a jam band as it gets. Everything is very orchestrated and precise. These are records and songs that have meant a lot to people, and they know each part and line by heart. You want to honour that and not change anything. Some situations call for you to do an interpretation of a song, but this isn't about that. Each note is key, and each note means something. So for me, the biggest thing is listening to what each person is doing – listening and reacting. I'm not up there to play just anything that comes into my head. If I'm not adding something of value, I don't play it."

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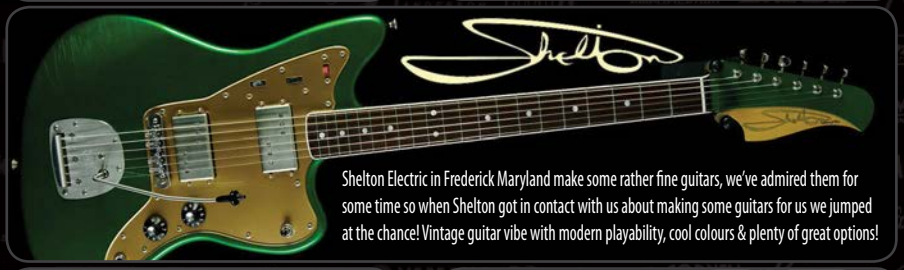

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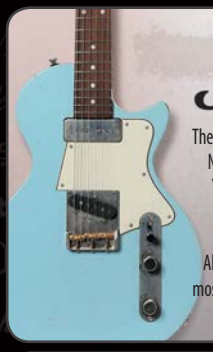

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GEAR REVIEWS

We've gone effects loopy in this month's review section, with no fewer than 13 different boxes of joy being put under the microscope by *The Guitar Magazine*'s expert team. There's plenty of variety here, too. Boutique stompbox fanatics will surely be charmed by Ryan Adams' latest signature pedal from Walrus or three new dirtboxes from one of the hottest new high-end effects brands from the USA: Rock Your Repaired Amp. If something more affordable is on your radar, however, then Fender's latest units are worthy of investigation, as are those from Electro-Harmonix. Finally, if individual stompboxes leave you cold, you really should check out Mooer's new Black Truck – a compact multi-effects unit that offers a wealth of sounds in a tiny but usable enclosure for very reasonable money. Truly we're living in the golden age of guitar effects!

Two-Rock Bloomfield **76**
Two channels of glorious boutique tone from US amp maker

Martin D-41 Reimagined **82**
A 2018 take on one of Martin's most beloved guitars

Fender Engager, Full Moon & The Pelt **86**
Three high-quality, affordable new stompers from the Big F

RYRA The 808, Fuzz-A-Matic & Tri-Pi Muff ... **90**
A trio of dirtboxes from the up and coming effects brand

Keeley El Rey Dorado & Aria **92**
A Marshall-style distortion and versatile drive/compressor

Electro-Harmonix Oceans 11 Reverb and Op-Amp Big Muff Pi **96**
A lush reverb and a Pumpkins-inspired take on the Muff

Walrus Audio Ryan Adams DEFCON4 ..... **98**
A new preamp, EQ and boost for the *Heartbreaker* guitarist

Mooer Black Truck **100**
Multi-effects in a compact package

Beetronics Royal Jelly **104**
A suitably apian fuzz/overdrive from the boutique firm

Orange Terror Bass **106**
The Brit brand brings its lunchbox stylings to the low end

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TWO-ROCK BLOOMFIELD DRIVE COMBO

If you like the idea of a Dumble-style amp with realistic power levels and a forgiving, player-friendly feel, this may be the Two-Rock for you. Huw Price takes the Michael...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

When we reviewed the Custom Reverb Signature back in 2017, it became apparent that Bill Krinard's return coincided with Two-Rock getting its mojo back, and this fact was reinforced by the Burnside later on in the year. The Bloomfield Drive is another Dumble-inspired offering – 6L6-powered 100- and 50-watt heads are also available, but in this 40/20 combo configuration a quartet of 6V6s provides the power, with gain cascading through four 12AX7 preamp valves.

Onboard there's a WGS manufactured 12-inch ceramic speaker and a 12AT7 valve-driven spring reverb. Switchable boosts are provided for bass, middle and treble, along with a tonestack bypass and a lead mode switch. A proprietary output transformer allows instantaneous power switching from the full 40 watts to 20W. As you might expect, the Bloomfield Drive is built like a tank and is cosmetically flawless in its grey and silver livery.

HANDS ON

With an amp like this it can be more informative to discuss what it doesn't do rather than what it does – but there wouldn't be that much to say on that score. It might not be best suited to provide the extremes of deafeningly loud cleans or dark metal crunch, but the Bloomfield Drive covers a whole lot of ground in between.

You might say the same about plenty of amps, but by and large 'Swiss army knife' amps tend only to do certain things really well. Much like the Custom Reverb Signature, the Bloomfield manages to do almost anything and everything in the most toneful and convincing manner. The cleans are shimmeringly transparent, overdrive tones are chewy and smooth while the lead tones sing with almost uncanny sustain and a total absence of fizz.

> IT MANAGES TO DO ALMOST ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING IN THE MOST TONEFUL AND CONVINCING MANNER

Also impressive is that, while few amps with so many switching options

Above **Our review Bloomfield Drive amplifier has been upgraded with silver witch-hat knobs. Chicken-heads come as standard**

KEY FEATURES

Two-Rock Bloomfield Drive 40/20 combo

- **PRICE** £4,499
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel fixed bias valve combo. Made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 40W/20W
- **VALVES** 4x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 4x 6V6
- **CONTROL PANEL** input socket, EQ1/EQ2, treble, middle, bass, lead gain, lead master, reverb, master, presence with bright, mid, deep, bypass, lead, standby (switches)
- **REAR PANEL** AC on, full/half power switch, 4/8/16 Ohm speaker outputs, effects loop send & return, reverb send, footswitch cable socket, fuse, IEC socket
- **SPEAKER** Proprietary Warehouse 12" ceramic
- **DIMENSIONS** 514x559x279mm
- **WEIGHT** 25kg/55lb
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350 815 **www.coda-music.com** **www.two-rock.com**

and controls are this straightforward to operate, it's no more difficult to dial in than a Fender Princeton. Better still, we never get the sense that we're struggling to discern the character of our test guitar's tonewoods and pickups through excessive and unnecessary circuitry.

IN USE

Rather than use high and low inputs, the Bloomfield has one jack socket with an accompanying EQ switch. In addition to providing two levels, the voicing is altered, with EQ1 being quieter, funkier and brighter, and EQ2 being louder and fuller.

Two-Rock suggest matching these for humbuckers and single coils respectively, which might make sense if you're struggling to derive clear and clean tones from ultra-hot and dark humbuckers. If however, you use more conventional pickups that conform to 'vintage' output levels, simply select the EQ setting that gets you closest to the particular sound you're chasing.

The three tone controls are accompanied by boost switches that operate within each frequency band. The bypass switch supposedly bypasses the tonestack, but it actually disengages the middle and bass control, while the treble and presence remain active. The effect is a gentle boost accompanied by a thickening of the midrange – more blackface to brownface than blackface to tweed.

Although billed as a two-channel amp, it's debatable whether the second channel is, in fact, the tonestack bypass or lead mode. We think the point is moot because the signal always follows more or less the same path, even with a bypass here or an added gain stage there. It could just as easily be categorised as a three-channel or even a one-channel amp, depending on how you view it.

LEAD MODE ADDS BRIGHTNESS, WHILE ALSO LOWERING THE REVERB AT HIGHER GAIN SETTINGS – SMART STUFF

The lead switch also activates its own master level control, which allows us to match the lead/normal levels to compare the tones. Lead mode adds brightness, especially at higher lead gain settings, while also lowering reverb in the mix. Since the likelihood is that you will want more gain and cut for soloing, this is smart stuff.

The amp comes with a footswitch to activate the lead and bypass modes, so we begin by selecting our preferred input EQ and then dialling in an edge of breakup clean tone with the tonestack engaged. Two controls are provided to set the Bloomfield's luscious spring reverb, with a level control at the front and a send level at the back. Higher send levels generate longer decay times and vice versa.

Activating the boost when running clean doesn't quite push the Bloomfield into overdrive. You

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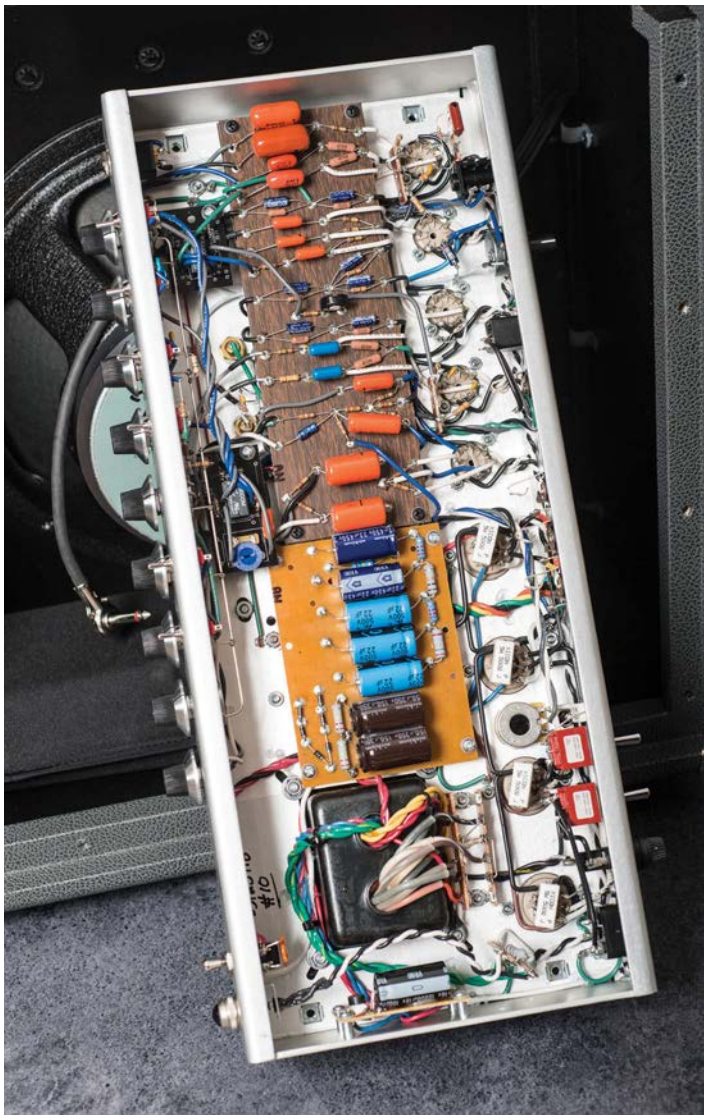


LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Bludo-Tone Bludo-Drive** (from **$4,399**) is available as a 6V6-driven 50-watt combo and the **Glasworks Overdrive Deluxe 50W combo** (**$3,625**) has many similar features to the Bloomfield Drive. DIY-ers should check out **Ceriatone**'s extensive range of Dumble-inspired kits

do hear a little more saturation, but it's more of a tone-changer than a game-changer. However, since the lead mode can be active irrespective of the boost setting, serious overdrive is certainly on the menu.

Fortunately, the lead mode isn't all about crass high gain. You can set the lead gain and lead master for all the shades of drive you may desire, but the best part is the way that sustain gets even longer at higher gain settings and with almost any held note, an upper harmonic swiftly drifts into the mix. Bloomfield by name and bloom by nature indeed.

Clearly there are any number of ways to run the Bloomfield Drive, and you can decide which one – or more – suits you best. After hours of fun exploring the amp's vast potential, we end up playing with lead mode permanently selected – occasionally activating the tonestack bypass simply to thicken things up when required.

The fact that we can do this is testament to the Bloomfield's extraordinary clean-up ability because it sounds just as vibrant when a guitar's volume is backed off and you get glorious cleans without any substantial drop in level.

THE BLOOMFIELD'S CLEAN-UP ABILITY IS EXTRAORDINARY – IT SOUNDS JUST AS VIBRANT WITH THE VOLUME BACKED OFF

It's also a very loud amp – so much so that the vast majority of our testing is done with half power engaged. At 20 watts the volume is only slightly reduced and we feel that the explosive dynamics and clarity are even better at full power. The Bloomfield's big tone suits Strats particularly well and the sheer weight of the lows does require some bass taming with thicker sounding guitars.

In 40W combo format with 6V6 valves, the Bloomfield Drive is slightly softer, warmer and less intimidating than the Classic Reverb Signature. However the punch, extraordinary touch dynamics and subtlety are equally evident and we think the reverb sounds better. In fact we like the whole amp better… and that's really saying something.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Exceptional tone
+ Intuitive and comprehensive control layout
+ A softer take on the Dumble theme

− Bass can get overpowering
− Chewier and softer dynamics than the Classic Reverb Signature

Like Two Rock's Classic Reverb Signature, this is a versatile tone sculptor of the highest order but with more manageable power levels and a softer tonal character

9/10

Designed in the UK by Patrick James Eggle, the all-new Shergold Masquerader makes a polite nod to its heritage and then boldly heads off in its own unique direction.

Made for those unafraid to be noticed, the SM01SD has a solid mahogany body, a beautiful solid rosewood neck and is loaded with genuine USA Seymour Duncan pickups.

ShergoldGuitars.com

SHERGOLD

MARTIN **D-41 REIMAGINED**

The 40 series guitars are some of Martin's most legendary designs, but for 2018 the company has reimagined its rosewood and spruce dread' for the modern player. Michael Watts pulls into Nazareth...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

KEY FEATURES

MARTIN D-41

- **PRICE** £4,150
- **DESCRIPTION** Solid wood acoustic dreadnought. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** East Indian Rosewood back and sides with a Sitka spruce top featuring forward shifted scalloped bracing, and a dovetail joint mahogany neck
- **HARDWARE** Schaller open-back Grand Tune tuners, gold
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.4"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at 1st fret, 22mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.52lb/2.05kg
- **FINISH** Gloss body, satin neck
- **CONTACT** Westside Distribution 0844 326 2000 **www.martinguitar.com**

Can there be a more iconic acoustic guitar design than the 14-fret Martin dreadnought? Since its creation in 1934 the dread has been used for historic performances and recordings in the hands of everyone from Elvis Presley and Joni Mitchell to Kurt Cobain and Michael Hedges. While the sound of a dread' is very often powerful and rich, there are certain factors inherent in the guitar's design that have lead some players (especially fingerstyle guitarists) to favour an alternative style of instrument.

In addition, in the past decades several upstart companies have sprung up and made some hay by claiming to produce Martin-style instruments "as they should be made". With this re-imagined D-41 model Martin has delivered a clear statement of intent to tackle many of these issues head on and prove to the guitar-buying public – as much as to the competition – that CF Martin & Company continues to deliver the highest standards of acoustic guitar possible.

HANDS ON

Visually, this reimagined D-41 is everything we would hope to see in a 40 series Martin. The rosewood (in this case East Indian) is straight-grained and perfectly quarter-sawn, and the Sitka spruce top is finished with a glowing vintage-aged toner. The body purflings, soundhole rosette and hexagonal block fretboard inlays are all cut from abalone which in conjunction with the Antique White plastic bindings and heel cap give the instrument a classic look. All the inlay work including the vertical abalone headstock logo, is executed to a high standard and supports, rather than distracts from, the beauty of the natural materials used. There will always be players who shy away from a more ornate instrument but here we feel the aesthetics of the build to be well judged and balanced.

The mahogany neck features Martin's 'Modified Low Oval' carve with a 1.75-inch nut width. This makes for an exceptionally comfortable playing experience. In fact, we found the neck of this guitar to be nothing short of addictive. There's space for accurate fingering all along the fingerboard and with its 2.05-inch string spacing at the saddle, and with the 'High Performance Taper', the guitar's neck feels fast and inspiring for fingerstyle and flatpicking alike. The back of the headstock features a carved diamond volute adding strength to the scarf joint. It is an elegant touch and well executed.

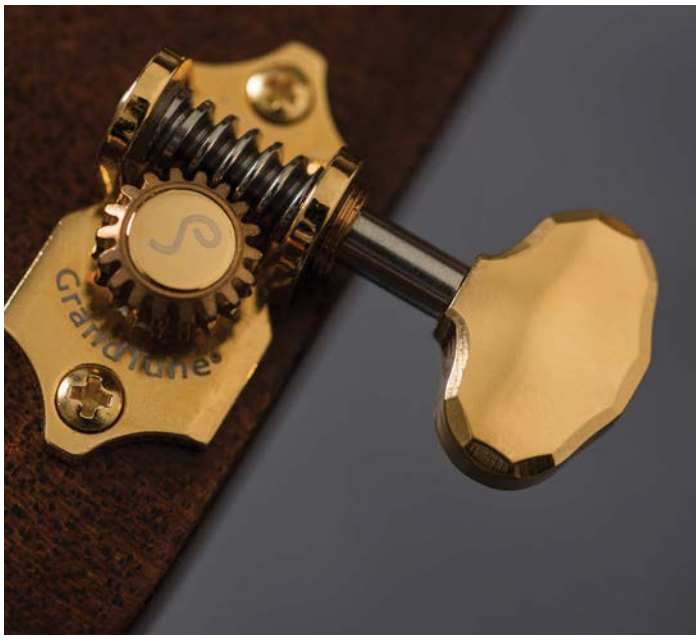
Like all dreadnoughts this new D-41 is a big guitar with its 15.62-inch lower bout. There's no escaping that. However, how a guitar plays is often much more than a set of measurements and it is a comfortable instrument to play seated or standing, despite its depth. We would argue that modern ergonomic flourishes such as an arm bevel or Manzer Wedge tapered body would rob this design of its vintage character.

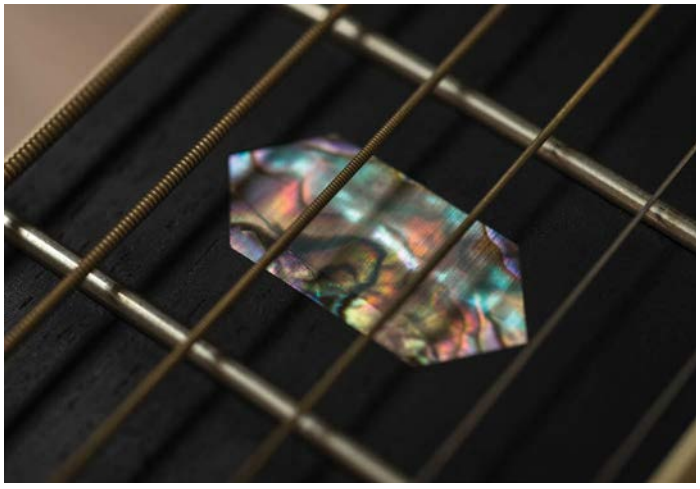
IN USE

With such high build quality, it would be a real disappointment if the sound of the Reimagined D-41 was anything less than excellent. However, the first strum of an open E chord is frankly sensational. Launching into some investigatory bluegrass G runs and Paul Simon-style fingerpicking we are rewarded with one of the finest dreadnought timbres this reviewer has heard in recent years. There is an immediate growl to the bass that paired with the liquid, sparkling trebles leaves us salivating at the thought of just how good this new guitar will get as it matures.

Accusations of boominess and lack of clarity are often levelled at the dreadnought design. It's important to bear in mind that the dreadnought was originally intended for the standing player, and as such,

WE'RE SALIVATING AT THE THOUGHT OF JUST HOW GOOD THIS NEW GUITAR WILL SOUND AS IT MATURES





LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

At this price point the Martin D-41 represents good value for money alongside instruments like the **Collings D2H** (**£4,295**), while the **SCGC Tony Rice Model** (**£4,699**) is another great take on the rosewood dreadnought idea

when flush against the player's body the instrument's back is effectively decoupled and dampened. When seated however, there is less contact between the back and the player and it is at this point that things can get unruly with the guitar inevitably succumbing to its bass desires. In the case of this D-41 the scalloped, forward shifted braced top maintains excellent clarity and articulation throughout, even when played hard. The bass response is full but not overpowering and under the close scrutiny of a pair of Gefell M300 mics the D-41 performs beautifully in a studio recording session.

Having explored standard tuning we pressed the D-41 into service as a modern fingerstyle instrument with some Michael Hedges-style pieces in drop tunings. When taken to a low C the guitar responds very well, the bass growling and full, and the trebles retaining their sparkle across the whole spectrum. Slapped harmonics and tapping runs retain their detail and presence, and the decay envelope of both chords and single notes is smooth and very musical. The neck carve feels superbly comfortable even with the fearsome stretches that are part of the joy of playing in DADGAD, and the string spacing at the saddle gives just enough room for Pierre Bensusan-style 'nail return' techniques. It's worth pointing out that the gold open-back Schaller Grand Tune machineheads and the bone nut make changing tunings easy, with rock-solid performance throughout.

In truth, we find it hard to put the D-41 down. What starts as our initial 10-minute note-taking session ends up an hour later as we discover new and musical facets to the instrument. It is a truly inspiring guitar. In short, with this Reimagined D-41, Martin has succeeded in creating an instrument worthy of its 185-year heritage. Not only that, but in this particular dreadnought model it has built a guitar that deserves to take its place with legendary vintage examples of the breed. While it commands a thought-provoking price tag, it's worth pointing out that we have not encountered a dreadnought sound of this quality outside of either vintage Martins or specialist Martin-style luthiers such as Lynn Dudenbostel or Wayne Henderson. And when you consider these alternatives would command a five-figure price tag, the D-41 looks far more reasonable.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Sublime tone and response
+ One of the best necks we've ever played
+ High-quality materials given the respect they deserve

– It's a large guitar but that's the nature of the beast, we really can't fault it!

A superb example of the dreadnought design that makes it a viable option for players of all styles who demand the highest quality

10/10

Fire Breathing Dragon - In A Box

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FENDER ENGAGER, FULL MOON & THE PELT

Fender's intriguing new range of stompboxes just got a little bigger with the addition of a clean boost, distortion and fuzz. Huw Price puts his foot down...

We first checked out Fender's new range of stompboxes back in May, and were very impressed with what we came across. It was a real statement that the big F was taking effects seriously for arguably the first time, and that sense was only enhanced by addition of three new pedals to the range at Summer NAMM – the Engager Boost, Full Moon Distortion and a fuzz, The Pelt.

The distinctive look of the first wave of pedals has been continued here, with the same folded aluminium chassis, plus a textured metallic finish that appears to be anodised. We also see the return of what is possibly the cleverest battery compartment ever devised. For those who didn't read about it last time, it's effectively a spring-loaded hatch that you can prise open with your fingers, load up a battery and let it flip back into the closed position. We suspect there are magnets involved too, because there's no way it can open accidentally. Genius.

Other features common throughout include cute miniaturised jewel lights and metal footswitches. And if you have ever struggled to see your settings on a dimly lit stage, you'll welcome the LED-backlit knobs.

If all this talk of LEDs has you worried about battery life, you can turn them off if you're not using a power supply, and battery users also benefit from a red warning LED on the battery compartment door that will light up when the charge drops below a certain threshold.

HANDS ON

We'll work our way through these pedals in order of gain – starting with the Engager Boost. This is essentially a clean boost with a level control that maxes out at 20dB, treble, middle and bass EQ controls with a +/-12dB range and a 400/800Hz switch for the middle control.

You can no doubt guess what the Full Moon Distortion is all about from its name, but there are several interesting features. A hi-treble control augments the TMB tonestack and the pedal doubles up as a clean boost with a second footswitch and an independent boost control along with a mini LED status light. The texture switch toggles between symmetrical and asymmetrical diode clipping and the bite switch adds more gain in the upper frequencies, while reducing low end.

And finally the fuzz, in the form of The Pelt – a curious name that could be taken to mean 'going full pelt' but is most likely a reference to the amount of hair that this stompbox adds to your sound. It's a silicon transistor based effect with the same level, tone and fuzz controls that regularly feature on fuzz pedals.

The interesting additions are a three way mid-voicing switch, a thick switch that fattens the sound and a mysterious bloom control that ranges from soft to hard. Rather than being a clone of a vintage fuzz, the circuit is apparently an original design developed in response to player requests.

IN USE

Assessing boost pedals is contingent upon what you actually want them to do. The obvious application is to put the proverbial boot up your guitar signal's behind to hit the first valve in your amp that bit harder, but then you need to decide if you want the colouration of a vintage-style treble boost, subtle tonal enhancement, absolute audio transparency or comprehensive frequency shaping.

The Engager slots into the latter category, but it does so in a fairly transparent way. With the equalisation controls set as neutral as possible and level at unity gain, we detect a barely audible loss of clarity despite some added brightness, but it's a better starting point than many boost pedals manage.

The bass and treble controls behave as expected, but we find ourselves running the treble slightly shy of halfway at all times to overcome the Engager Boost's inherent treble lift. Middle is the key control and playing through typical mid-scooped tonestacks, applying a boost on the 400Hz setting allows you to fill out the sound if you want to.

Tweed, brownface and Vox-style circuits with single tone controls can sound a little boxy with the 400Hz boost, however. In this context the 800Hz setting, that can harden a mid-scooped tone, instead enhances definition along with the level boost.

The knob LEDs and true bypass/ buffer switch are welcome features and the buffer adds very little

KEY FEATURES

Fender Engager Boost

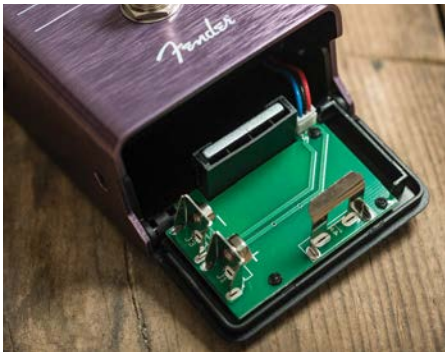
- **PRICE** £87
- **DESCRIPTION** True/buffered bypass clean boost pedal. Made in China
- **CONTROLS** Level, bass, treble, middle, freq
- **FEATURES** LED-backlit knobs, 9V battery or external power (not included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127 x 79 x 64mm

Fender Full Moon Distortion

- **PRICE** £130
- **DESCRIPTION** Buffered distortion pedal with boost feature. Made in China
- **CONTROLS** Level, hi-treb, treble, middle, bass, boost, texture, bite, gain
- **FEATURES** LED-backlit knobs, 9V battery or external power (not included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127 x 103 x 64mm

Fender The Pelt

- **PRICE** £85
- **DESCRIPTION** Buffered fuzz pedal with boost feature. Made in China
- **CONTROLS** Level, tone, bloom, fuzz, mid voice switch, thick voice switch
- **FEATURES** LED-backlit knobs, 9V battery or external power (not included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 127 x 79 x 64mm
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 0845 305 1122 **fender.com**



LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

For boost with EQ check out the **Orange Two Stroke** (**£126**) and **Laney Tony Iommi** (**£119**). For distortion with boost there's the **Xotic AC Plus** (**£133**) and **Bogner Ecstasy £121**. Fuzz fans should audition the **Electro-Harmonix Green Russian Big Muff** (**£80**) and **Orange Fur Coat** (**£118**) – and indeed the EHX and RYRA fuzzboxes elsewhere in this issue!

colouration. Placed anywhere in your pedal chain, the Engager Boost will preserve the treble content of your signal whether it's activated or not.

Moving onto the Full Moon, this really is an out-and-out distortion pedal. With the gain below noon it's thin, overly bright and has a metallic rasp. Happily, things improve enormously as the gain increases and proceedings ease into a velvety sustain – but only with the treble and 'hi-treb' rolled back.

The core voicing of this pedal is very bright, to the extent that it renders the bite and hi-treb controls rather redundant for all but the darkest guitars. In isolation it can be rather shrill but check out our demo over at youtube.com/theguitarmagazine and you'll hear how the Full Moon slices through a dense wall of fuzz.

Configuring two independent bypass switches is fairly easy, so it's a little surprising that Fender has chosen not to do it here – as a result, the Full Moon's onboard boost can only be used when the distortion side is activated.

However, since the boost comes before the distortion in the signal chain, it does wonders for the Full Moon's tone when the gain is set lower. You can dial in some very credible overdrive tones with impressive clarity and a player-friendly dynamic response, but what we presume is the symmetrical texture setting (down position) always sounds a bit thin and uneven compared to the other option.

As we move onto The Pelt, it quickly becomes clear that Fender has made a very decent job of making this a fuzz for all occasions. It can do the thick and seemingly infinite sustain of a Big Muff and the splatty, starved transistor vibe of a Maestro or Shin-Ei. Rather than damage limitation, the mid voicing switch provides useful onboard tone-shaping and it works effectively with the thick switch.

The bloom control acts on upper harmonics, adding complexity as it advances to the point where single notes do indeed 'bloom' with harmonic overtones. Because we never find ourselves struggling for clarity, we can appreciate the tone control's range rather than be obliged to keep it turned high. We also like the way this fuzz cleans up from the guitar to deliver a range of Hendrixy fuzzy 'clean' tones without the evenness of note decay being compromised.

All these pedals are reassuringly solid, superbly priced, and do their jobs well. The Full Moon might be a little fierce for some, but if you're looking for a tone-shaping boost, the Engage is a good-sounding option, while The Pelt is a particularly enjoyable and versatile fuzz.

The Guitar Magazine **VERDICT**

Engager Boost

+ Fundamentally uncoloured tone
+ Effective equalisation
+ Middle centre frequency switching
– Slight added brightness

The Engager ticks a lot of boxes for an affordable clean boost

8/10

The Guitar Magazine **VERDICT**

Full Moon Distortion

+ Decent high-gain tones
+ Extensive frequency shaping
– Brightness limits versatility
– Non-independent boost

If you like it heavy and need to cut through a dense mix, this is the dirt pedal for you

7/10

The Guitar Magazine **VERDICT**

The Pelt

+ Wide range of cool fuzz tones
+ Impressive clarity with heavy fuzz
+ Impressive cleanup
– Not true bypass

An affordable one-stop solution for a wide variety of vintage and contemporary fuzz sounds

9/10

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RYRA 808, FUZZ A-MATIC & TRI-PI MUFF

After hitting the bullseye with The Klone Pedal, RYRA turns its attention to the Tube Screamer, Fuzz Face and Big Muff. Chris Vinnicombe steps to it...

RYRA (aka Rock Your Repaired Amp) is a small company based out of a workshop in Texas. We first became aware of RYRA main-man Shane Logan's work via The Klone Pedal – Logan's take on Bill Finnegan's legendary Klon Centaur, which is rated by many in the know as a dead ringer for the real thing. It's been a fixture of this writer's own pedalboard for over a year now and has rarely been switched off.

Building on the reputation of the Klone, Logan recently unveiled his versions of three other classic stompboxes. There are no prizes for guessing from where the 808, Fuzz A-Matic and Tri-Pi Muff take their inspiration, although despite its military paint job the Muff is based on the early 'triangle' iteration rather than later green Russian units.

Each pedal is as robust on the outside as its internal wiring and PCB layout is neat. The 808 features the JRC4558D chip that many believe to be key to the sonic magic of original TS808 and early TS-9 units. The Fuzz A-Matic is equipped with NOS germanium transistors while the Muff's fuzz is silicon in origin. All three stompboxes here are true-bypass so look elsewhere for a buffer.

The top-mounted jack connections are worthy of note. This space-saving design means that, when plugged in, each of these RYRA units occupies approximately the same amount of width on your pedalboard as a mini-pedal with side-mounted jacks – good news for those who prefer a more compact board.

IN USE

Comparing the 808 to a modern Ibanez Tube Screamer Mini and a vintage TS808 proves interesting. The RYRA is immediately warmer *and* clearer than the Mini, and although the £52 pedal is excellent for the money, it's somewhat outgunned by this modern boutique interpretation.

NEXT TO THE REAL MCCOY, THE RYRA 808 IS CERTAINLY CLOSE ENOUGH TO RETIRE YOUR EXPENSIVE ORIGINAL

Next to the real McCoy, the RYRA 808 puts in an admirable performance – certainly close enough to allow you to retire your expensive original from stage use without missing it too much. The old TS808 has a little more grit and midrange complexity but with prices for a vintage unit now north of £500 – even exceeding £1,000 in some cases – all but the most diehard of tonehounds are priced out of the vintage game.

We switch over to the Muff and wow… this is thick, rich, not too fizzy and more Black Keys than Smashing Pumpkins in its overall voicing. It's deliciously textured and massively infectious. Unlikely to get lost in a mix, if only this pedal had been around when we were struggling with thin-sounding units in the late 1990s. It's like swapping saccharine for molasses.

Engaging the Fuzz A-Matic feels like stepping further back in time and predictably it's less gainy than the Muff and more responsive to your guitar's onboard controls. The noise level does jump up a fair bit, although that comes with the territory. Again it's fat and gritty and musical, offering cranked-tweed and garage-psych tones with the fuzz control around noon, right through to Jimi when you crank it. Impressive stuff.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Although it sounds more like an old TS-9, **Maxon**'s **OD808** (**£109**) is an excellent Tube Screamer for a bargain price. Electro-Harmonix has just released its own **Triangle Big Muff reissue** (**£93**), while the **MXR Classic 108 Fuzz Mini** (**£104**) is a pedalboard-friendly take on the classic Fuzz Face circuit.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Confidence-inspiring build
+ Pro-quality tones
– There are cheaper alternatives out there

Few of RYRA's competitors pack as much rich and addictive vintage tone into powder-coated casings. Whichever flavour you choose, you won't be disappointed

9/10

KEY FEATURES

RYRA 808

- **PRICE** £199
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Level, tone, drive
- **FEATURES** True bypass, 9V mains supply (not included) or PP3 battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 120 x 65 x 40mm

RYRA FUZZ A-MATIC

- **PRICE** £199
- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, fuzz
- **FEATURES** True bypass, 9V mains supply (not included) or PP3 battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 120 x 65 x 40mm

RYRA TRI-PI MUFF

- **PRICE** £199
- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, tone, sustain
- **FEATURES** True bypass, 9V mains supply (not included) or PP3 battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 120 x 65 x 40mm
- **CONTACT** Rock Your Repaired Amp **theklonepedal.com**

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The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEELEY
EL REY DORADO & ARIA

The godfather of the indie stompbox boom keeps the good times rolling with a Brit-voiced distortion and a two-in-one overdrive/compressor… Richard Purvis says let there be rock

We hope Robert Keeley's remembering to eat, sleep and go to the toilet. It can't be easy to make time for the boring but essential stuff when you're seemingly spending every waking moment transforming your boutique pedal business into a global empire, and this summer saw the emergence of yet another two contenders from Keeley's busy Oklahoma workshop.

First up is the El Rey Dorado, which started out as a hand-built limited edition but has now gone into full production. 'El Rey Dorado' translates as 'The Golden King', and the royalty we're talking about here is the famous black and gold livery of a Marshall amp. Put simply, it's a Plexi simulator.

Of course, the term 'Plexi' isn't always clear – it's become a catch-all term for any Marshall that's old enough to have been assembled by someone wearing flares. But the definitive Plexi is the 100-watt Super Lead made famous by Hendrix, Clapton and Townshend in the late 60s: a hugely important amplifier if only because it brought new levels of loudness to rock music. That's the El Rey Dorado's target tone in 'hi' mode, while 'lo' is meant to sound more like the relatively civilised JTM45.

Other than the mode switch you just get controls for drive, tone and level. They're a tad cramped, but this pedal feels every bit as solidly built as the amps that inspired it.

Compression is where Keeley started out, so there's some serious pedigree in the Aria. In fact the right-hand side of this mains-only unit looks very much like a rejigged clone of the Keeley Compressor Plus, with the same four knobs and only the switch for fast/slow release time missing. And it isn't really missing, just being shy: you'll find it in titchy form mounted to the bottom of the circuit board.

THE ARIA DOES A GREAT JOB OF MAKING EVERYTHING SOUND THAT LITTLE BIT BIGGER AND CRISPER

If the control layout on the left side also looks familiar, that's because it's based on Keeley's Red Dirt: a valve-like overdrive with FET input stage and switchable hi/lo gain modes. But two more features make this more than just a pair of pedals shacked up in the same box: a toggle switch in the middle lets you flip the order of the two effects, as with the D&M Drive; and if you have a couple of splittable TRS cables going spare, you can even (once you've flicked four dip-switches on the PCB) place other pedals between the compressor and the overdrive in your signal chain.

IN USE

We begin with a Tele, a clean-ish tweed amp and the El Rey Dorado's gain set conservatively low… and our first thought is that they must have wired that drive control back to front, because there's nothing remotely conservative about the noise that comes out of this little thing. It's gleefully ferocious, like a vintage Marshall with the bright channel cranked somewhere close to full blast – and yes, this is on the 'lo' setting.

Are we complaining, though? Not a bit. This sound is all about smooth harmonic saturation, with a shamelessly fizzy top end that refuses to be pushed into harshness, and it's a joy to mess around with. From sweetly compressed chords and speedy lead work on the bridge pickup to bluesy runs with that uniquely British metallic clarity in the neck position, it never sounds anything less than entirely convincing.

KEY FEATURES

Keeley El Rey Dorado

- **DESCRIPTION** Distortion pedal. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £149
- **CONTROLS** Drive, tone, level; lo/hi gain switch
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 111 x 68 x 48mm

Keeley Aria

- **DESCRIPTION** Compressor and overdrive pedal. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £199
- **CONTROLS** Compressor level, sustain, blend and tone; overdrive level, drive, tone and low/high gain switch; FX order switch; internal dip-switches for humbucker/single-coil (fast/slow release) and TRS insert operation
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 124 x 95 x 50mm
- **CONTACT** Keeley Engineering **robertkeeley.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Assuming an actual Marshall Plexi amplifier is out of the question, you have plenty of pedal alternatives for the El Rey Dorado – including the **Wampler Plexi-Drive** (£189) and, if you can get hold of one, the **Fire Carpe Diem** ($258). For sheer versatility, including speaker-emulated DI, your best bet might be the **Tech 21 British** (£149). There aren't many pedals offering independently switchable compression and overdrive, but one is the **Truetone Route 66** (£179), while the **Friedman Sir-Compre** (£169) and **Pigtronix Philosopher's Tone Germanium Gold Micro** (£159) both let you inject some grit into your compressed signal

Switching to 'hi' brings a leap in level but the tone actually feels less saturated, with more midrange bite and a fuller low-end response. It really is, in a way, like changing to a higher-output amp. The character of the distortion is essentially the same as in 'lo' mode, but this is a more tight and strident version, and that's a great option to have at hand. In truth, the El Rey Dorado isn't the most versatile stompbox that will ever grace your board – the tonal variety is almost as limited as the gain range – but that switch adds just enough complexity to keep it addictive beyond the first pigeon-scattering blast.

In high-gain mode, the overdrive side of the Aria doesn't actually sound all that different to the other pedal – you could see it as a more sensible cousin, with tidier hair and much better school reports. The drive shares some of the same Marshall-like smoothness and squishing-out of midrange spikes, but the low end is more rounded and the treble much less pronounced.

On the low-gain setting those mids return with woody boldness, and we can even start thinking about using the word 'transparent'. But now there's a slightly buzzy quality to the distortion itself, almost like a low-gain fuzz, and single notes can sound pinched with drive set too low. Luckily, plugging into an amp that's already crunching up a fair bit helps – and so does a dash of compression. Speaking of which…

Used on its own, the compressor has the same flattering effect we've come to expect from Keeley's well-respected pedals of the type. You do have to keep the sustain control down low to avoid unnatural popping effects on the transients, which is a shame; but when used tastefully – with at least a dash of untreated signal blended in – this side of the Aria does a great job of making everything sound that little bit bigger and crisper, while keeping your playing dynamics nicely contained.

The two effects are most definitely a complementary pair, and changing the order of the circuit has a subtle but significant effect on the 'size' of the resulting sound: broadly speaking, compression into drive means more distortion, and drive into compression means more clarity, though that's very much dependent on settings. And while the Aria isn't as immediately seductive as the El Rey Dorado, between seven knobs and two toggle switches there are plenty of variables to explore.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

Keeley El Rey Dorado

+ Smooth and sizzling overdrive in vintage Plexi style
+ Top end is super-bright but somehow never gets spiky
+ Hi and lo modes are quite distinct but equally tasty
– It's a two-trick pony, and both of those tricks are very gainy

A little box of fun that nails those classic cooking Marshall tones, the El Rey Dorado comes with two hot Plexi flavours for the price of one

9/10

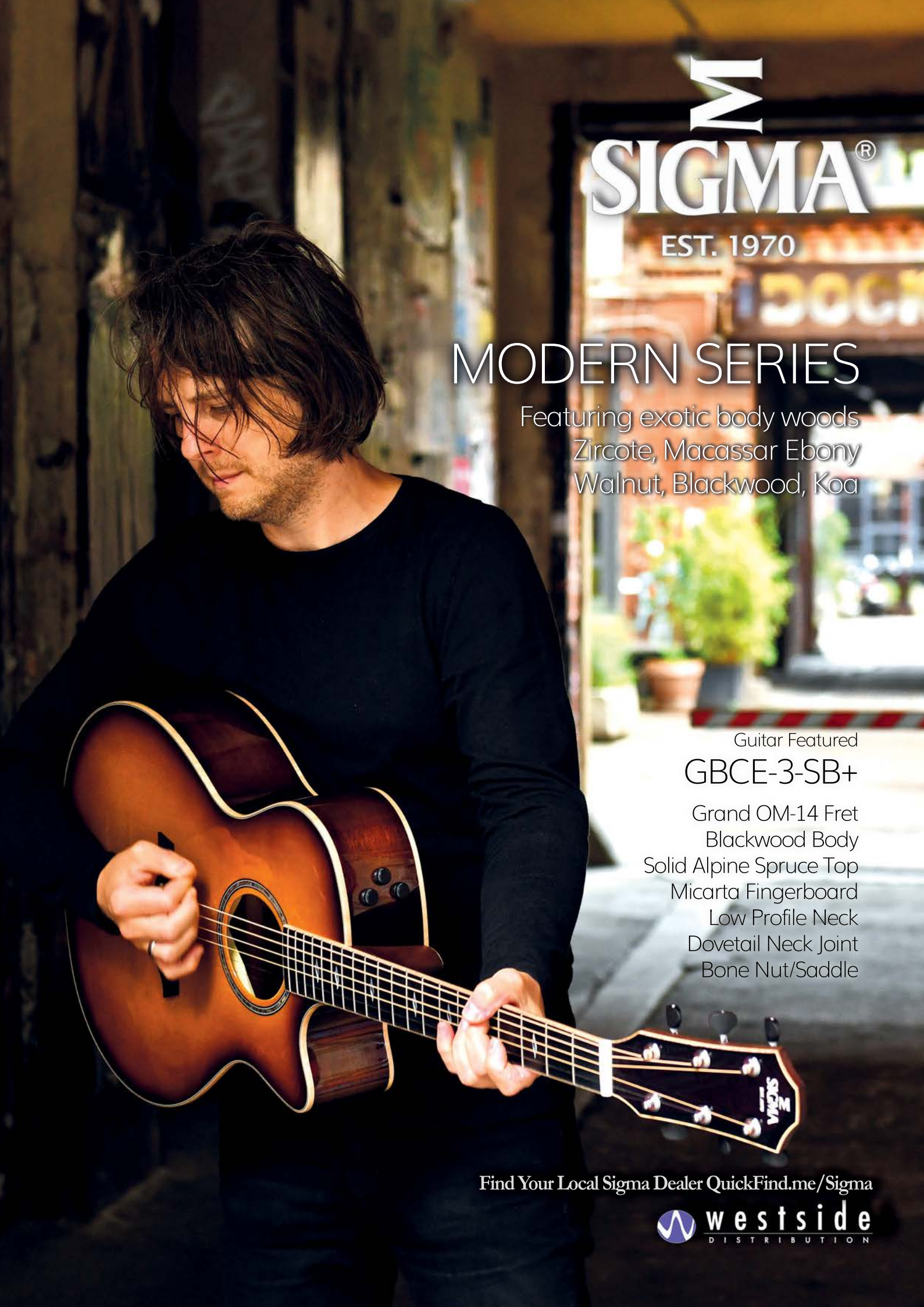
The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

Keeley Aria

+ Addictively sweet Keeley compression on one side…
+ With warm and fluffy overdrive on the other
– Drive doesn't always convince at lower gain levels
– Compressor gets thumpy a little too easily

Keeley knows a thing or two about compression, as the Aria evidences. Two classy pedals in one, with a useful order-flipping option

8/10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ELECTRO-HARMONIX
OCEANS 11 & OP-AMP BIG MUFF PI

EHX debuts a multi-layered reverb with a twist, and a Pumpkin spice Big Muff with circuitry courtesy of Billy Corgan himself. Michael Watts fires up his ice-cream van and heads to the desert…

First established in 1967, Electro-Harmonix is arguably the closest thing we have to a heritage effects pedal brand. The sounds created by these legendary stompboxes have featured in the work of correspondingly legendary artists from Gilmour and Cobain to REM and The Police. Regardless of genre, EHX pedals are everywhere. Here we have a pair of new units that aim to provide the functionality, high sound quality and value for money on which EHX built its reputation.

"This thing is dangerous… It's bigger than both of us," yawned pugnacious psychedelic troubadour John Martyn in his song *Big Muff*. He had a point. The original Big Muff enclosure contained more fresh air than just about any other stompbox to date, but the advent of the EHX's nano design (with its joyful standard power jack) makes the Big Muff a serious contender for even the most space-conscious pedalboard owner.

This Op-Amp model is the third nano Muff Pi in the EHX range. At first glance the existing Big Muff Pi Nano and Green Russian Pi models might have the grungier end of the sonic spectrum covered. This new pedal, however, was built in tandem with Smashing Pumpkin Billy Corgan (it even says "Your Slice of Pumpkin Pi" on the box) and features switchable Op-Amp circuitry to provide authentic vintage Muff tones. Given that Corgan played a huge role in the resurgence in popularity of the Big Muff in the 1990s, this is significant news.

With a similar design to EHX's excellent Canyons delay, the Oceans 11 reverb hints at a huge amount of functionality with a total of 11 separate reverb 'voices'. This impressive selection is further increased with a responsive footswitch (allowing double tap and hold for certain features) a Mode switch and even a jack for an external footswitch, making the Oceans 11 one of the most feature-packed pedals of any kind that we have seen at this price point.

IN USE

Given the Pumpkin associations, there's only one sensible course of action when plugging in the Op-Amp Muff – give it a bit of Billy. Conscious of the fact that he achieved his sound from judicious balancing of master volume and preamp gain stages we do likewise with a tube-driven Marshall amp. With imagined snare drum rolls in our ears, we pound out the iconic clean riff from the *Cherub Rock* before stamping expectantly on the Op-Amp Muff and basking in the roar. It's that *Siamese Dream* sound, or near as damn it.

And yet there's more – with the Op-Amp engaged it's a very good Muff sound for any genre. It's grippy and nuanced enough for Gilmour and can even do early Sabbath tones.

One criticism often levelled at the original pedal through is that it can disappear in a mix. In this case we find that our sound remains present throughout. The fact that such tone is available at this price point is cause for celebration. Today is truly the greatest day…

Given the sheer amount of sounds on offer with the Oceans 11, we could happily triple the length of this review, but here are the highlights – the first being an exceptional spring reverb. A marked improvement on that found on the Holy Grail, this setting even gives you a "kicked reverb tank" crash for all your surf needs with a double tap of the footswitch.

The Revrs setting (a reverse reverb effect) is spooky and inviting, especially for lead tones. As the names suggest Echo gives you a pleasing digital delay feeding into a plate reverb, Trem is a tremolo effect which can be further tweaked with the mode switch allowing everything from subtle pulsing to almost ring-modulated madness and Mod provides all you could wish for from a gentle wash of chorus and vibrato to the outright lunacy of the classic EHX Flerb (flanged reverb, for the uninitiated). Holding the footswitch down also triggers the infinite setting (like a self-oscillating delay) on most of the reverb settings.

The Dyna setting works like a slow volume for dramatic swells and cello noises (tracking remarkably well) and at six o'clock on the knob we are greeted by Auto-Inf, which listens to your playing and crossfades to a new reverb wash upon every attack. This is particularly atmospheric when coupled with distortion and/or fuzz. Finally we have Shim and Poly, two varieties of pitch shift, the former adding an upper octave wash and the latter giving you two configurable pitch shifts. We find these settings particularly worthy of exploration. It's worth noting that all the sounds respond well to tweaking, too.

We spend several inspiration-filled hours finding new and musical textures with the Oceans 11 and although some of the sounds are decidedly on the lo-fi end of things (it won't kick your Strymons or Eventide H9s off the upper left corner of your board based on sound quality alone) it still represents good value.

With this brace of new EHX pedals, we see a company consistently unwilling to coast on its reputation. Like other stompboxes in this now classic range, both units are musical, inspiring and relevant across various genres for not a lot of cash.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **EHX Green Russian Big Muff Pi** (£75) is a different take on the Muff sound. If you feel the Op-Amp model is lacking gate and EQ controls then check out the JHS-modded 'Pumpkin Patch' version (£135). On the Oceans 11 side, the **TC Electronic Arena** (£121) is another compact versatile digital reverb, or if you want a double footswitch and stereo outs then check out the **Mooer Reverie** (£99)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Oceans 11 offers a great selection of reverbs and time-based effects, worth it for the spring reverb alone!
+ Muff delivers all those Pumpkins sounds and more
+ Compact size compared to classic EHX pedals, and easy to power

– Some of the Oceans 11's sounds are a bit lo-fi
– A stereo output would have been a nice addition, too

A great sounding fuzz that excels at more than just Seattle (or indeed Chicago) tone, and an inspiring reverb that has plenty of unusual sounds with that EHX signature

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Electro-Harmonix Op-Amp Big Muff Pi

- **DESCRIPTION** Compact fuzz pedal
- **PRICE** £75
- **CONTROLS** Volume, sustain, tone, bypass switch, Op-Amp selector mini toggle switch
- **FEATURES** 9V battery or 9V PSU (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 70 x 115 x 54mm

EHX Oceans 11 Reverb

- **DESCRIPTION** Compact digital reverb pedal
- **PRICE** £120
- **CONTROLS** Reverb type, FX level, time and tone knobs, mini mode button, double-tap responsive footswitch, additional footswitch input
- **FEATURES** 9V DC PSU only (supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 70 x 115 x 54mm
- **CONTACT** Electro-Harmonix **www.ehx.com**

DEFCON4
RYAN ADAMS // WALRUS AUDIO
LAUNCH
PAXAM

WALRUS AUDIO DEFCON4

A three-band EQ/boost with achingly cool 1980s stylings designed in collaboration with singer-songwriter Ryan Adams. Michael Watts picks up the red telephone…

If you've ever had to swap guitars with differing outputs mid-set, you'll know it can lead to headaches. And that's what this pedal – a collaboration between Ryan Adams and Walrus Audio – aims to resolve. The Defcon4 is designed to make tone sculpting and gain staging a breeze with impressive boosting and cutting capabilities coupled with superlative sound quality.

There's no escaping the looks – Adams' love of 80s pop culture was evident on his collaboration with JHS, the VCR, but this *Wargames*-inspired aesthetic is another level. Upon applying power, the pedal blinks four times, and it is then up to the user to figure out which switches turn on which lights, and what that means…

IN USE

To test out the Defcon4 as intended, we gather a Fender Stratocaster, a humbucker-loaded Les Paul and a Gretsch White Falcon. Dialling in an 'on the edge' sound with the Les Paul we then plug in the Stratocaster and launch the Defcon4 to begin dealing with the resulting drop in power. Matching the gain levels is very quick indeed with the 10db Mosfet boost switch, but we are particularly impressed with the way the Defcon4's EQ section allows us to smooth out the Stratocaster's bridge pickup response while cutting the mids to make the most of the guitar's in-between sounds.

The White Falcon's Filter'Trons spring to life with the Defcon4 unleashing even more hollow snarl than usual. The Defcon4 comes with the internal trim pots that govern the parametric mid-range controls set to Adams' own preferences but they do serve to add even more versatility to the pedal should you need it. Going back to the Les Paul we find that the Defcon4 makes for a pleasing 'always on' boost with the treble boost adding a silky quality to the top end that is particularly inspiring on the bridge humbucker.

THE DEFCON4'S TREBLE BOOST ADDS A SILK TO THE TOP END THAT IS PARTICULARLY INSPIRING

While the sound quality is high there is sadly a bit of a *Sewers At The Bottom Of The Wishing Well* feel about the Defcon4 when one considers the asking price. Yes, the pedal is well made and sounds very good but the functionality offered is matched and often exceeded by a wide variety of EQ pedals currently on the market. In some cases, these retail for around half the suggested price of the Defcon4.

We electric guitarists have long been afflicted with a moth-like attraction to the glow of shiny objects and there will doubtless be a market for the Defcon4 based on its aesthetic alone – not to mention the allure of its much-loved signature artist. It sounds great, too, but given the price tag, the Defcon4 is something of a niche proposition unless you are a particularly well-heeled stopbox junkie or Ryan Adams completist. But then again, English reviewers can be so mean…

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ High quality sound
+ Powerful EQ
– The 'Launch' rocker switch is a tad impractical and might have been better as a footswitch

A characterful boost and EQ pedal with a killer aesthetic that really does minimise amp-tweaking when swapping guitars – if only its retro stylings extended to 1980s pricing!

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Walrus Audio Defcon4 Preamp/EQ/Boost

- **PRICE** £289
- **DESCRIPTION** Preamp, EQ and boost pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Low cut and boost, mid cut and boost with parametric EQ, hi band cut and boost, Launch switch 10db Mosfet boost, internal mid EQ trim pots
- **FEATURES** 9VDC, center-negative PSU (100mA minimum, not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 118 x 93 x 39mm
- **CONTACT** Face Distribution +32 3844 6797 **face.be** **walrusaudio.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE…

The **Empress ParaEq** (**£249**) offers advanced parametric performance without the 1980s kitsch. For graphic EQ cut and boost capabilities then check out the classic **MXR M108S 10-Band EQ** (**£134**)

MOOER
BLACK TRUCK

The champion of cheeky miniature pedals has loaded a bunch of effects into one rock-minded unit. Richard Purvis gets behind the wheel for some mini monster trucking

If you look closely at the Black Truck, you'll see an extremely compact multi-effects unit with six footswitches across the bottom. If you look slightly less closely, you might (just about) see an actual black truck, with six sets of wheels and the driver's cab at far left. Bit cheesy? Be thankful they didn't take it too far and have smoke billowing out of the headphone socket.

Mooer was there at the start of the current mini-pedal boom, and has over 60 of them in its current range, so it really can't have been much of a challenge to take a handful of those effects and line them up in a single enclosure. The resulting unit is about the size of an overstretched ciabatta and not much heavier.

There really isn't much more to the Black Truck than what you see on the top panel: the controls may light up sci-fi green but they're pure analogue, so there's no storing and recalling of preset sounds here. You can, however, spare yourself a little bit of toe-dancing by saving basic 'scenes' of which effect modules are switched on. Single footswitches can then be assigned to these groupings rather than to individual effects.

So, we start at top right with the only non-footswitchable module: a simple three-knob compressor, based on the Mooer Yellow Comp and engaged via a toggle switch. Below that is the overdrive, a version of Mooer's rather fine Tube Screamer

type, the Green Mile; and next along is a high-gain distortion that's been designed specifically for the Black Truck with "all of your hard rock and metal needs" in mind. This includes a noise gate and a switchable midrange boost/cut, but there's more tone-shaping on offer: to the left of that module is a five-band EQ that can be placed before or after the distortion.

The digital side of the Black Truck kicks off with a modulation section that can be flipped between phaser, tremolo and flanger, and has a time subdivision dial complete with 'random' mode; then we get reverb and delay squeezed into one, with the option to engage either or both together.

And that's basically it. The 'front wheel' is a tap tempo switch that doubles up as a basic tuner; on the back panel we find a loop for inserting other pedals between the analogue and digital halves of the unit, plus twin outputs (described as 'true stereo', though the effects are all mono), and an output-muting headphone socket with its own level control.

IT MAY NOT REPLACE YOUR PEDALBOARD, BUT WILL DO A JOB FOR HOME PRACTICE AND HAND-LUGGAGE-ONLY JAUNTS

As an introduction to the world of multi-effects, it seems like a pretty thorough selection – and if you're not fussed about the compressor or the high-gain distortion, you also have the Red Truck option. That one's around £50 less, and looks a bit more like a lorry.

IN USE

We start out by scrabbling around for a 9V power supply that can pump out the 1,000mA current specified in the manual – that's much more than the average single stompbox demands, and there's no adapter supplied in the Black Truck's neat padded case. In the end, after getting half an hour's use from a 200mA Electro-Harmonix unit before it becomes hotter than the surface of Mercury and shuts down, we dig out a 500mA Line 6 supply that gets us through the testing process without losing its cool.

Not the best of starts, but switch on the compressor and you may well forgive all. With the 'comp' dial around nine o'clock and tone cranked

KEY FEATURES

Mooer Black Truck

- **DESCRIPTION** Multi-effects pedal. Made in China
- **PRICE** £294
- **FEATURES** Dual amp outputs plus headphone output with level control, FX loop between EQ and modulation; true bypass, powered by 9V 1,000mA mains supply (not supplied); padded case included
- **DIMENSIONS** 370 x 96 x 51mm
- **CONTACT** Strings & Things 01273 440442 **www.mooeraudio.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

It'll only let you run three effects at a time, but the **Line 6 M9** (**£239**) does allow you to store and recall up to 24 scenes. The **TC Electronic Nova System** (**£308**) is packed with high-quality digital sounds, and you know you're not going to go far wrong with the **Boss GT-100** (**£316**)

up to keep things perky, it adds a healthy dose of fullness and presence without any thumping or pumping. It can get silly when pushed, but in the right context this is certainly a compressor you could leave on full-time.

We shan't dwell on the overdrive for long – as expected, it sounds just like a Tube Screamer, with that classic combination of smooth break-up and added upper-midrange snarl. The high-gain distortion has more to prove… and it turns out to be every bit as fiendish as we were hoping. Non-rockers look away now, but this is a wall of righteous noise, blisteringly powerful yet clear in the top end and equally strong at the bottom. The tone controls work well enough, but you're going to want to set the EQ module into a big pointy V-shape to get that full-on scooped chugging tone. It'll get you there all right, with the gate doing just enough to tame the background roar and sharpen up the staccato bite of palm-muted chords.

There are no surprises in the digital half of the Black Truck. All three modulation sounds are perfectly workable – the flanger is a particular highlight, excelling at subtly atmospheric settings – and having control over the shape of the tremolo is really useful, even if 'random' mode is a little less chaotic than we'd like.

That just leaves us with the reverb and delay section – both of which sound clear, natural and well balanced, and work well as an ambient double-act. As long as you don't demand spring-like reverb judder or tape-like delay wobbles, there's nothing at all lacking here.

One thing that could be better is the action of the footswitches, which engage only when you lift your foot off them rather than at the very moment of stompage – an irritating quirk that can make those big on-the-beat changes tricky to time. This is not an issue we've had with fully analogue Mooer pedals – could it be a side-effect of making the switches programmable, we wonder?

No such complaints about the headphone output, which produces a respectable sound for silent jamming into the early hours. There's a hint of that plasticky 'DI' quality, but we've heard a lot worse… and that's true of everything about the Black Truck, which is unlikely to replace anyone's lovingly assembled pedalboard, but will do a solid job for home practice and hand-luggage-only jaunts.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Smartly judged selection of good-quality effects
+ High-gain distortion is as versatile as it is feisty
+ Headphone sound is more than acceptable for silent noodling and songwriting

– Delayed footswitch response time is annoying
– No 1,000mA power supply included

A pocket pedalboard that has all the essentials covered, especially if you're a metalhead

8/10

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Handmade with hand tools by luthier James Millman. Spruce Top. English Walnut B&S. Ebony F/board & Bridge. K&K Pickup. Case.

Guild JF30 (Circa '1996-'98)
Roadworn appearance/condition. Spruce Top with Maple Back & Sides. Big tone. Fishman Soundhole pickup. Hard case included.

Martin 000-18 Standard
Sitka Spruce Top. Mahogany Back & Sides. Tortoise Binding. Polished Finish. 24.9" short scale neck. With Martin Hard Case.

Martin 000-15M
Full Mahogany 000-14 Fret Body, with Mahogany Neck. Dovetail Neck Joint. Abalone Inlays. Hard Case Inc.

Fender Player Telecaster Left Handed
New Series! Alder Body. Modern C neck. 9.5" Radius. 2x Alnico 5 Single Coil Pickups. Finished in Black.

Fender Player Telecaster
New Series! Alder Body. Modern C neck. 9.5" Radius. Finished in Butterscotch Blonde. Other colours available. Please call.

Fender MIJ Pink Paisley Jazzmaster
Traditional 60s. Made in Japan. Finished in Rare Pink Paisley. Alnico Single Coil Pickups. A future collectable!

Fender 60th Anniversary Jazzmaster
Finished in Black. Traditional Appointments. To celebrate 60 years of the Jazzmaster! Includes a Fender Hard Case.

Gibson J-45 VOS
True Vintage Limited Edition. Circa 2008. Adirondack Red Spruce Top. Built in Fishman Pickup. With Hard Case. Photos Online.

Gibson Nick Lucas Reissue
Circa 2009. 14 Fret Model. Maple Back & Sides. Wonderful condition. Big Tone. With Original Gibson Hard Case.

Gibson 2013 Les Paul Standard
Honeyburst. Grover Locking Tuners. Push Pull Pots with Coil Tap, Phase Switch & Lead Circuit. Excl Condition. With Gibson Hard Case.

Gibson Les Paul Custom (Circa '73-'74)
Cross Bound Body. 3 Piece Neck w/ Valute. Rare Two Piece Top. All Original. Great Condition for age. Hard Case included.

Rickenbacker 330 Jetglo
In Stock - Just arrived! Classic Ricki Design. Rosewood fingerboard. Maple Hollowbody. Hi-gain pickps. With Hard case.

Rickenbacker 330/12 Fireglo
Deluxe Hollow Body with a special contoured body. Rosewood Fingerboard with Triangular Inlays. Made in USA. With Hard Case.

Rickenbacker 4003 Midnight Blue
Brand New! Stunning Deep Blue finish. A Classic Timeless Bass guitar. More Photos & info online. Comes with Hard Case.

Gibson SG Raw Power
Circa 2009. Natural Satin Finish. All Solid Maple Construction. 50s neck. Snappier tone. Good Condition. Padded Bag (non Gibson).

Fender Jaco Pastorius
A signature bass to the famous Jaco Pastorius. Fretless. Alder Body. C-Shaped Neck. With Hard Case.

Gibson EB3 Walnut (Circa '73-'74)
Very rare in Walnut & this condition. Stamped as 'Second'. Nice condition for age. Gibson Fibre Style Case included.

Fender Custom Shop Relic '64 Jazz
Made in 1999. Best Relic'ing we've seen. All original. Very Rare. Original Documents Inc. Original Fender Hard Case included.

Fender FSR Limited Edition 70s P Bass
Finished in Natural. Beautiful Ash Body. Maple C Profile Neck. Bound Fingerboard. Vintage Tuners. Includes Padded Bag.

Fender '65 Deluxe Reverb
12" Jenson Speaker. 22 Watts All Valve. Great Condition. Two Channels (Normal & Vibrato). Includes Footswitch & Slip over Cover.

Top Hat King Royale 35 Combo
Circa 2004. 2x12" Valve Combo. 35 watts. AC30 Based. Handwired. 2 channels. EL84 Power Valves. 12AX7 Pre-amp Valves.

Blackstar Artist 15 Limited Edition
Blonde finish Limited Edition Version. Fantastic condition. Big sounding 15 watt valve amp. Comes with Footswitch.

Fender Bassman 135 (Silver Face)
Circa 1979. Fantastic condition. Big Clean Fender Tone. 4x 6L6 Power Valves. More info and photos online.

KEY FEATURES

Beetronics Royal Jelly Overdrive/ Fuzz Blender

- **PRICE** £289
- **DESCRIPTION** Twin-channel overdrive and fuzz blender pedal. Made in the USA
- **CONTROLS** King/Queen channel OD/fuzz blend, dry, lo, hi, Honey, volume, knobs. Channel selection, Buzz Off added gain and effect on/off footswitch
- **FEATURES** 9V DC power only (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 155 x 129 x 70mm
- **CONTACT** Face Distribution +32 3844 6797 **face.be** **beetronicsfx.com**

BEETRONICS ROYAL JELLY

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

A hand-made, twin-channel anger box with a sting in the tail by a groundbreaking young company. Michael Watts gets a taste of honey...

California's Beetronics have been the darlings of the last few NAMM shows with a gaggle of upsettingly good-looking pedals and a no-compromise approach to tone. The new Royal Jelly is branded as an 'overdrive/fuzz blender' and features two channels (labelled Queen and King from left to right) each of which offers a sonic continuum from overdrive to fuzz. The first thing we notice when unboxing the Royal Jelly is that the quality of design and build are excellent. There is a running bee theme throughout, which may or may not endear you to the pedal depending on the strength of your passion for monophyletic hymenopterae. The look of the Royal Jelly though is more art nouveau meets Dan Dare, with a beautiful brass control panel and retro style knobs. But is it more than just another Bumble clone? Sorry…

IN USE

The Royal Jelly offers two flavours of grit within each of its two channels. We decide to assign overdrive duties to the Queen and Fuzz to the King (possibly from force of habit when it comes to keeping vintage fuzz pedals at the start of the chain) although each channel is capable of all stations in between these two extremes. The channel selection footswitch is the left of the three on the pedal although that is not immediately obvious as the labels for the footswitches are miniscule. Helpfully an LED indicates either Queen (Red) or King (Green).

The initial OD sound is extremely good, taking well to single coils and humbuckers alike while bringing out a rare level of snarl in Filter'Trons. The Honey knob in the centre adjusts the gain level for the OD circuit from clean boost to medium gain and the volume, bass and treble knobs give you all the control you could wish for. There is even a Dry knob allowing you to blend in your clean tone for a sharper attack while maintaining the fundamental character of the excellent sounds on offer.

Selecting the King channel with the OD/Fuzz knob set to full fuzz gives your tone an instant saw-toothed shot in the arm with a superb classic rock fuzz. More 'Face' than 'Muff' we were particularly taken with how well the two channels worked in tandem when changing from one to the other. Rather than starkly differing pedals, the Royal Jelly's two voices feel immediately complementary and a natural progression from one to the other.

The centre footswitch activates the 'Buzz Off' circuit which piles on snarling highs and detail to your sound, rather like having a quality boost pedal earlier in the chain. It's a great sound, indeed after hours of exploration we failed to find a tone that was anything other than musical and inspiring.

Rather like a honeycomb, the Beetronics Royal Jelly is absolutely full of sweet spots, with the pedal's ability to blend in your dry sound being perhaps the sweetest morsel of all, unlocking an almost limitless capacity for nuanced, satisfying tone-sculpting.

RATHER LIKE A HONEYCOMB, THE BEETRONICS ROYAL JELLY IS ABSOLUTELY FULL OF SWEET SPOTS

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Excellent OD and Fuzz tones which sound superb blended together
+ High-quality build and a truly beautiful chassis
+ That Dry knob opens up a whole world of possibilities

– Footswitch labelling is so small it requires compound eyes to see clearly
– Some players might demand separate EQ controls for each channel

A well thought out and impressively musical machine from this refreshing new company that keeps pushing the boundaries

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you're after a gnarlier twist on the two-voice theme then try the **Fuzzrocious Cat King** (£269), or the **Crowther Audio Double Hotcake** (£299) for classic tones featuring a cascading gain stage

"THE TERROR BASS DELIVERS THE GOODS FOR RETRO-ROCK, 60S POP, INDIE, GRUNGE, CLASSIC ROCK AND A WHOLE LOT MORE BESIDES"

ORANGE TERROR BASS

Almost 10 years on from its introduction, Borehamwood's finest resurrects the original lunchbox bass head for 2018. Chris Vinnicombe takes a bite...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Orange's Tiny Terror popularised the lunchbox guitar amp craze over a decade ago and was followed by bass version, although both models have been discontinued for couple of years. Until now, that is, because the Terror Bass is back.

Arriving in its familiar nylon gigbag complete with a side-pocket for a couple of cables and a shoulder strap for an easy load-in, the Terror Bass is a hybrid, single-channel circuit housed in the now classic white powder-coated chassis adorned with the Borehamwood company's pics-only control panel, vintage-style logo and the coat of arms of House Orange.

Although the layout is similar to the original, the mini-toggle labelled 'clean' on the front panel is designed to deliver more headroom and smoother tones. The redesigned hybrid amplifier features a 12AX7 front-end based on the company's AD200 head, while a pair of Speakon connectors around the back and a 4/8-ohm impedance switch allow the diminutive unit to kick out 250 or 500 Class D watts.

On the right-hand side, you'll find a balanced XLR direct out and an effects loop with a valve-driven send and solid-state return. A cooling fan is visible through the grille but powering up reveals that it isn't intrusively loud.

IN USE

At the risk of causing controversy... getting a good bass sound isn't exactly rocket surgery. Some of the greatest studio bass recordings of all time have been achieved with a DI box and a compressor and live, it's as much a game of frequencies as it is tones. Are you a guitarist switching over to bass? Listen to the kick and snare, they are your twin gods.

Given a thorough workout with P and J pickups and played with fingers and pick, the Terror Bass delivers the goods for retro-rock, 60s pop, indie, grunge, classic rock and a whole lot more besides. The clean switch allows you to tailor your headroom to taste, while cranking up the gain adds raunch and edge without turning to fizz or losing lows. The onboard EQ doesn't have the widest bandwidth you'll ever hear but the basic tones on offer are so effective in a band mix that we find only minor adjustments are required.

Combined with Orange's OBC112 rear-ported cabinet featuring a 400-watt 12-inch Lavoce Neodymium speaker, there's plenty of punch and lows and more than enough power for the average function-band or club gig. Need more? Try running it in four-ohm mode with an extra cabinet, or bolstering your signal by running the excellent-sounding post-EQ and volume DI output straight into the PA.

The Class D revolution has redrawn the landscape when it comes to compact bass rigs, and there's certainly far more serious competition today in the lightweight, affordable bass amp stakes than when the first iteration of the Terror Bass arrived nearly a decade ago. That said, thanks to that clean switch, the 2018 version is considerably more versatile than the original – and it still provides wonderfully organic tones that rockers and retro-inclined bassists alike will love, while breaking neither back nor bank.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The popular **Markbass Little Mark III** (£429) is highly versatile and weighs in at just 2.9kg. **Ampeg's Portaflex PF-350** (£283) is 3.6kg and comes with considerable heritage

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Looks the business with the matching cabinet
+ New clean switch offers much-increased versatility
– There are smaller, lighter and more affordable options

Offering a range of clean and raunchy bass tones that pack a punch, Orange's Terror Bass redux is ideal for function-band bassists and the unsigned originals circuit

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Orange Terror Bass

- **PRICE** £599
- **DESCRIPTION** Hybrid single-channel bass amplifier head. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 250 (8 ohms)/500-watt (4 ohms) Class D power amp
- **VALVES** 1x ECC83/12AX7 preamp, 1x ECC81/12AT7 effects send
- **CONTROL PANEL** Volume, bass, middle, treble, gain. Clean switch, pad switch for variable input sensitivity
- **REAR/SIDE PANEL** Balanced XLR DI out, 2x 1/4-inch jack FX loop send and return, 2x Speakon speaker outputs
- **OPTIONS** OBC112 ported speaker cabinet (£399)
- **DIMENSIONS** 307 x 190 x 160mm
- **WEIGHT** 4.6kg/10.2lb
- **CONTACT** OMEC 020 8905 2828 **orangeamps.com**

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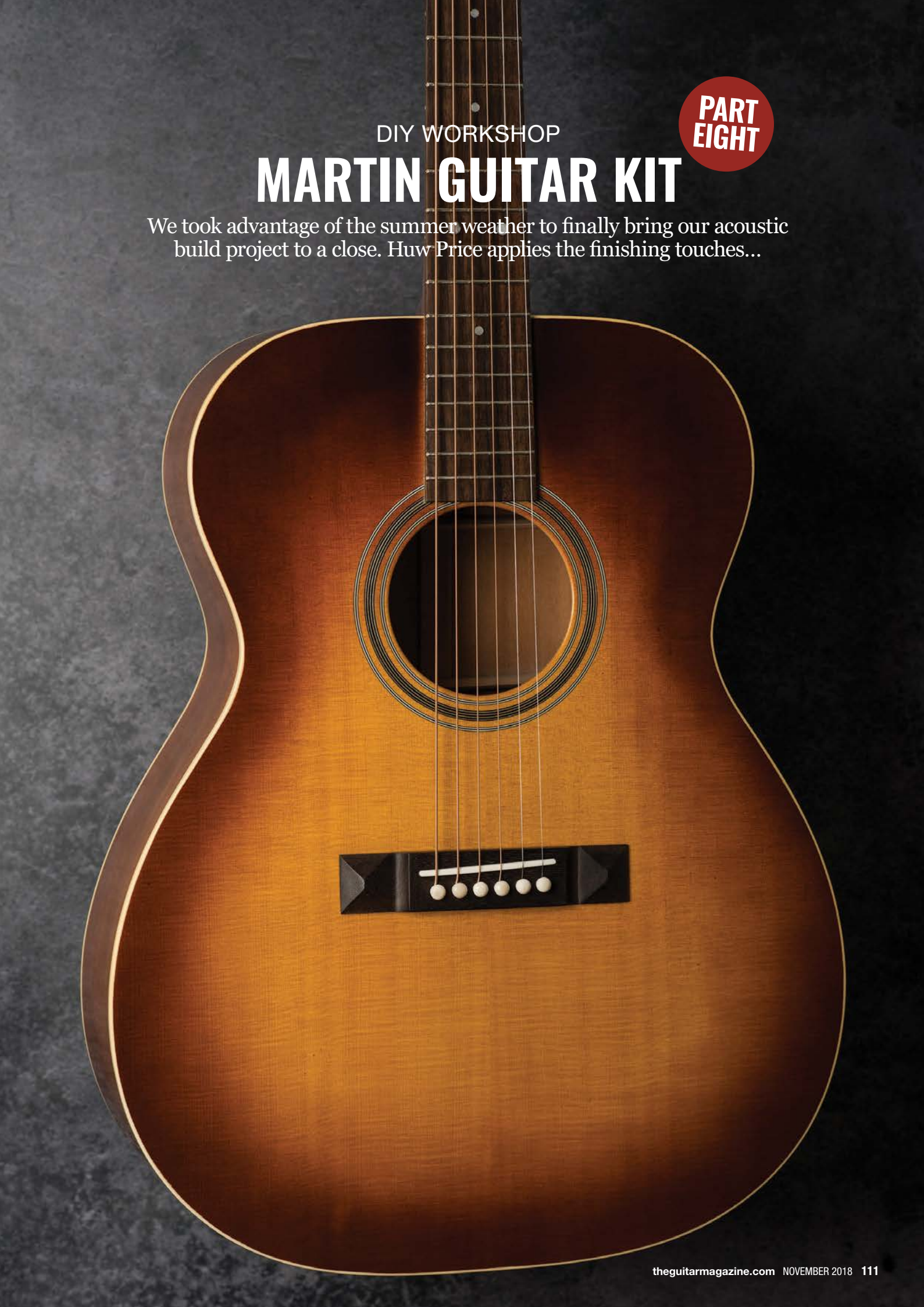
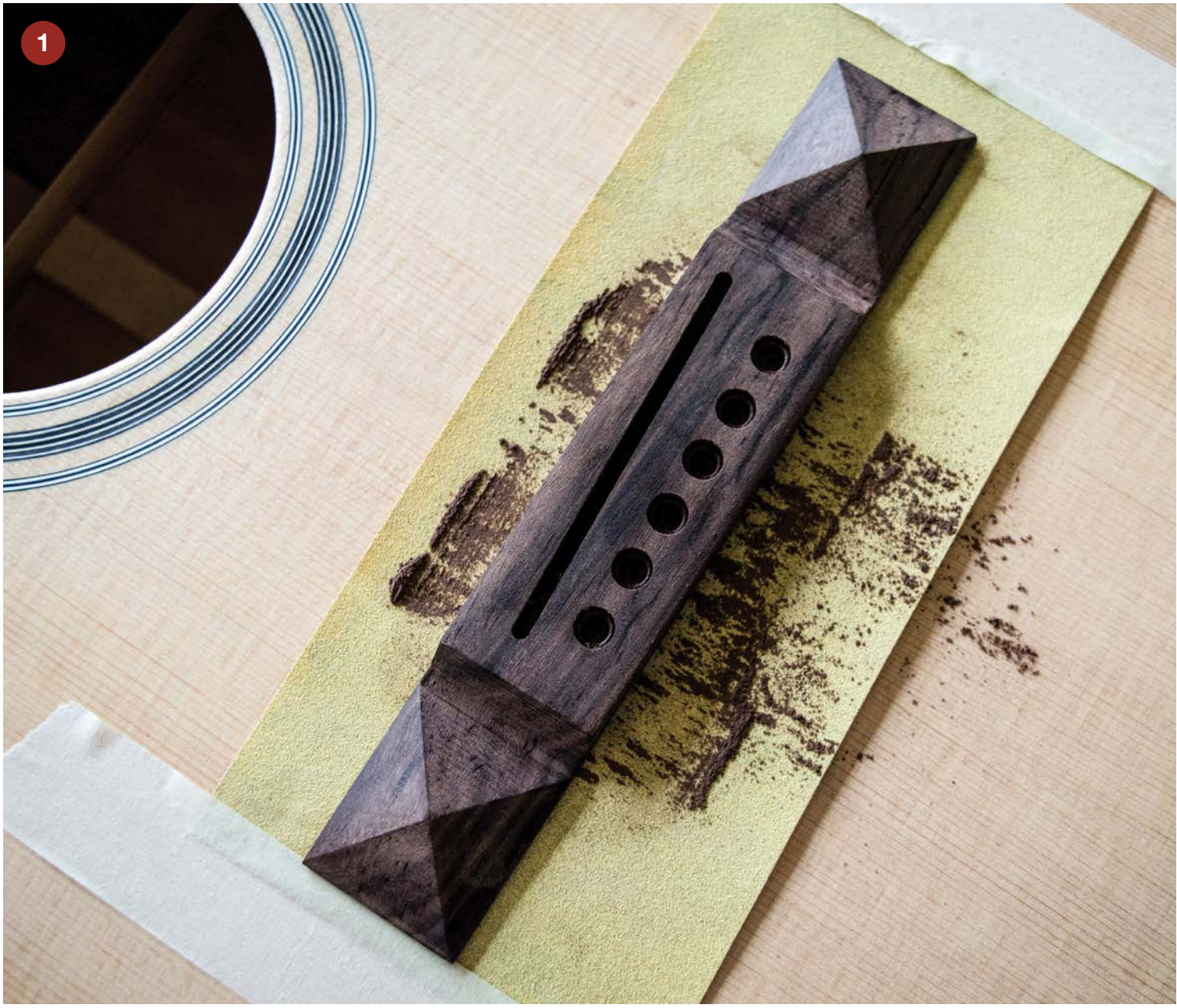


DIY WORKSHOP

PART EIGHT

MARTIN GUITAR KIT

We took advantage of the summer weather to finally bring our acoustic build project to a close. Huw Price applies the finishing touches...



1 Sanding the underside of the bridge to match the soundboard curve allows it to contact the wood without the ends having to be clamped flat

I'm sitting down to write this final part of our Martin acoustic guitar kit adventure exactly one year since it all began. In truth, it's only taken so long to get to the end because I've been getting on with various other projects in-between, and I complicated things by customising the kit. If I'd just put it together in the way Martin recommends, it would have been a much shorter build, but instead it's been quite the undertaking!

In the previous instalment I covered the spraying process that gave our guitar its distinctive and unusual sunburst finish. Before getting onto the exciting parts, however, I have to get through all the grunt work involved in bringing nitrocellulose lacquer up to a high-gloss finish.

I've covered this process in DIY Workshop several times before and as always, I move through various grades of wet and dry abrasive paper – starting with 800-grit, followed by 1,000, 1,500 and 2,000. From there, I move onto Micro-Mesh and after progressing through 4,000-, 6,000- and 8,000-grit, the finish starts to take on a lustre.

However, I did try a couple of new techniques for this project. With each change of paper and Micro-Mesh, I also alter the direction in which I'm working. So, the 800-grit goes with the grain, 1,000-grit goes across it, and so on.

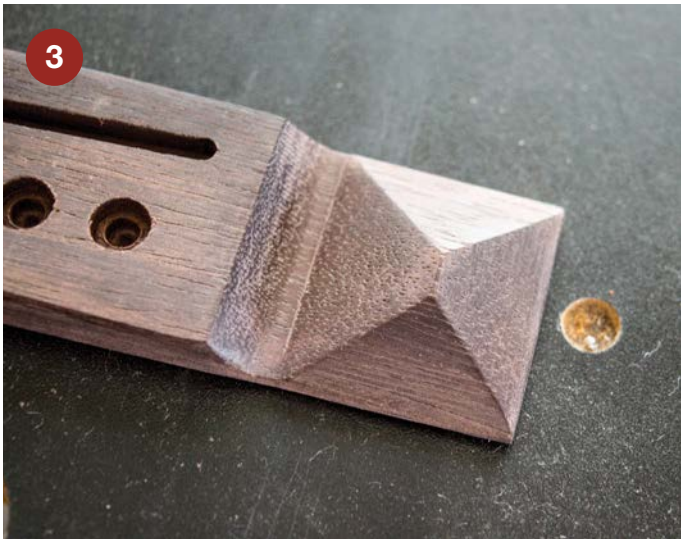
SHINE ON

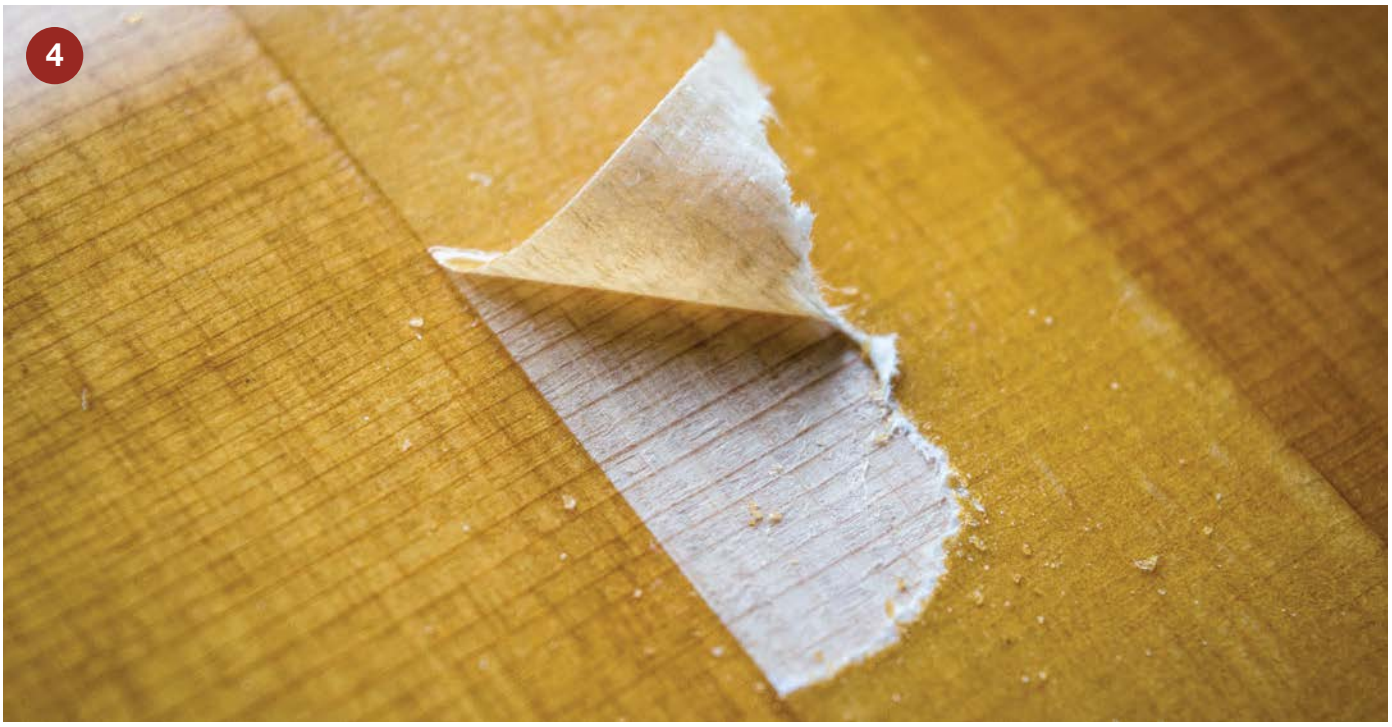
As usual I polish up with Farecla G3 compound followed by 3M Machine Polish. This creates a deep gloss effect, but looking across the finish, very fine scratches are still visible on the surface. For relic finishes it looks fine, but I'm aiming for greater finesse here and so I decide to try mechanical buffing.

Pro luthiers and guitar manufacturers use buffing wheels, but since I don't have one, I use my hand drill with a foam polishing mop fitted to it instead. You can buy these mops and the drill mounting attachment from Halfords, and they're pretty cheap.

I have been wary of using power tools for delicate tasks since the great Washburn parlour orbital sander debacle of 2003. However, I've gained a bit of experience since then and the decision pays off.

I apply liberal quantities of Meguiar's Scratch X compound to





the guitar, dab it around with the mop and then start the drill. I go with a moderate speed, very light pressure and I keep the mop moving to prevent heat build-up.

Quite quickly those annoying fine scratches begin to disappear and when the excess compound is removed with a clean microfibre cloth, the guitar begins to look even shinier. After about 30 minutes I'm done, and with some MusicNomad F-One Oil on the fretboard, the guitar looks pretty good.

BRIDGE OF SIZE

Before getting onto the serious business of gluing the bridge in place, I first want to discuss the bridge itself. You may have wondered why the masking tape patch I attached to the bridge area prior to spraying is rectangular. Well, here's the story...

The kit arrived with a Richlite bridge and fingerboard due to the difficulties in shipping rosewood internationally. While I'm sure it would have done a fine job, I never intended to use it, as despite the current CITES restrictions, rosewood guitar parts are still available from European suppliers.

I used the Richlite 'board as a template to make my own from a rosewood blank, and added a ziricote peghead overlay – and after that, it was clear that only a rosewood bridge would do.

A belly bridge is duly purchased for less than £10, and it's really nice. However, as the project has progressed, the belly bridge started looking wrong on this guitar.

Searching for a 'rosewood pyramid bridge' online turns up something suitable, but when it arrives it turns out to be about 17mm longer than a Martin bridge. Even so it looks so much better and the cost is negligible.

The saddle slot is a lot wider than Martin's, so the saddle supplied with the kit cannot be used, but Allparts UK supply a thicker bone blank that will also allow a bit more scope for intonation adjustment.

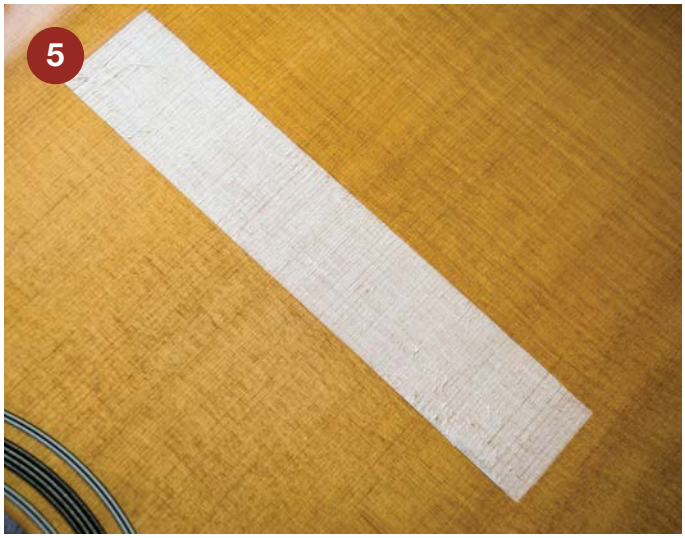
GETTING IN SHAPE

When fitting acoustic bridges, you'll most likely find that the bridge base is flat, but the soundboard is arched. Rather than force them together using clamps strong glue, it's better to sand the bridge's underside so it conforms to the soundboard curve.

2 The bridge arrived oversized, so the ends are trimmed off to match the six-inch Martin standard

3 The trimmed bridge is filed and sanded to restore the pyramid shape, albeit with a small difference

4 The masking tape is peeled off towards the centre to prevent the finish from being torn off the wood



5 With the masking tape removed we're left with exposed spruce and clean lines for gluing the bridge

6 Paper towels protect the finish as the bridge is about to be held in position for final measurements and index pin location

7 Tiny index pins are glued into holes drilled through the A and B pin holes and the bridge's underside is scored for gluing

The procedure is the same one used for fitting floating bridges to an archtop. I tape 180-grit paper to the soundboard, directly over the area where the bridge will be attached, place the bridge on top and move it back and forth along the length. If you mark the base with pencil lines, you'll know you're done when all the lines have vanished and you're left with smooth rosewood.

I address the length issue by sawing off the ends off the bridge using a mitre block. This changes the shape of the pyramid, so I use a file and a sanding block to reinstate the pyramid shape. Rather than meet at a point in the centre, I'm left with a centre line due to the changed dimensions, but I like the look and since it's a bit different to a traditional Martin design, I decide to keep it.

The re-shaped bridge is sanded smooth and after protecting the base with masking tape, I apply some brown shoe polish to enhance the colour, and buff it out.

UNDER PRESSURE

It's time to remove the masking tape from the bridge area, so I make a shallow incision in the centre with a craft knife, slide the blade under the tape and lift. It comes away quite easily, so I tear across to the edge and begin peeling it off.

At all times I aim to pull the tape away from the edge and towards the centre, because I don't want to peel finish off the wood. It's stressful but nothing untoward happens and I'm left with very clean edges. The tape lifts up some spruce fibres, so I lightly sand away any loose pieces.

After protecting the soundhole edges with taped on kitchen roll, the bridge is placed in position and clamped. Unfortunately you do need specialist clamps for this, and the three I bought years ago cost over £30 each. However, I notice that Axminster sells an implausibly named 'Deep Throat G Clamp' for just £8. I haven't used one, but it may work okay for you.

This is when measurements and alignment must be checked and re-checked, because you only get one shot at this. Once I have verified that all is good, I score around the bridge with an ultra sharp blade.

The reason being that it's common practice to make the bridge patch slightly smaller than the bridge and then remove a millimetre or so all around the edges. This

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8 Three Ibex clamps hold the bridge in position as the hide glue sets and they are left for 24 hours

9 The pin ends are filed to prevent the string balls from catching and a reaming tool widens the pin holes to create a taper for a tight fit

10 This set of Stewart Macdonald Golden Age tuners comes pre-relic'd, and they're good value for money

11 Applying masking tape to the headstock makes it easier to mark the screw hole positions

12 The tools used in this feature include a polishing mop and mounting pad from Halfords, two reamers, a set of nut files and a home-made bridge clamping caul

ensures the bridge base is glued onto bare wood with no lacquer underneath, for the strongest possible joint. Unfortunately the lacquer proves more inclined to flake than cut. I just about get away with it on this occasion, but if I ever do this sort of thing again, I'll simply make the masking tape patch identical in size to the bridge.

With the bridge finally clamped in position, I drill 2.5mm holes through the bridge base and into the spruce beneath. The bridge is removed and I superglue two short lengths of 2.5mm dowel in the holes to serve as index pins. These will stop the bridge moving when it's being clamped and I'll be able to drill straight through them when I'm fitting the bridge pins.

Before applying vintage-appropriate hot hide glue to the bridge, I score the underside to provide a key for the glue. I also tape a clamping caul in position under the bridge plate. With two clamps place in position, I do a couple of practice runs and then go for it – adding a third clamp in the centre after the two end clamps are tightened. A wet cloth takes care of the glue squeeze out, and the clamps are left in position overnight.

GEARING UP

Before I can string the guitar up, I will of course need to fit some tuners. Although the die-cast units Martin supply with the kit are perfectly decent, I feel vintage-style open-gear tuners are more in keeping with the overall aesthetic.

Waverlys are wonderful, but eye wateringly expensive and although I've had good results with Grover Sta-Tites, I decide to order some relic'd Golden Age tuners from Stewart-MacDonald because they've impressed me on B&G guitars and they're quite affordable.

The bushings are slightly too wide for the holes I drilled in the headstock months before ordering the tuners, so I use a reamer tool to widen their diameter to fit. Really, I should have done it before spraying the finish, but I manage okay. I widen the holes until the bushings sit a couple of millimetres proud of the headstock, then I press them in using a G clamp.

Masking tape strips are placed either side of the holes on the back so I can mark the tuner screw positions. With a masking tape depth stop wrapped around a 2mm bit, I drill 12 pilot holes, remove the masking tape and install the tuners. They certainly look the part and the yellowed plastic buttons even match the binding – great stuff.

PIN HEADS

After all the care taken to protect the wood during the build process and the gargantuan amount of effort involved in finishing, drilling six holes through the body is a heart-in-mouth moment. But this guitar requires bridge pins so there's no avoiding it.

A bridge-sized cutout in a piece of cardboard is placed over the bridge to protect the top. I also cover the body with thick towels. The bridge came with pilot holes drilled part way through, and this really helps as I start with an equivalent sized drill bit.

I use as little pressure as possible while I drill to minimise chip out as the drill breaks through. Then I work my way through a couple more drill bits of increasing diameter to widen the holes.

Bridge pins are tapered, so I use a reamer tool that I bought many years ago especially for doing this job. You can get them from luthier suppliers, but if you search online you can generally find them cheaper on auction sites.

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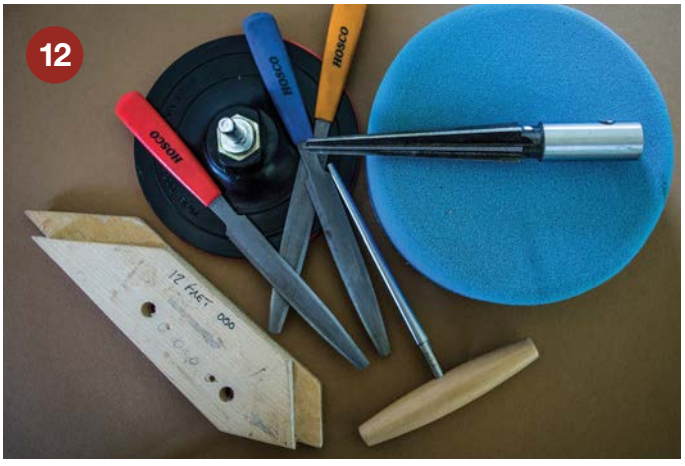
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EDITOR'S NOTE

These pages feature detail images of the finished build taken in our photo studio – we're sure you'll agree that Huw has done a fantastic job. The first thing that's striking when you pick it up and play it is how 'old' this guitar sounds – there's a palpable dustbowl, Depression-era flavour to the wonderfully dry-yet-sweet tones on offer.

The kit may hail from Nazareth but sonically, it has more in common with Gibson and Kalamazoo guitars of 1930s than it does with what you might think of as a classic Martin tonality. Capo'd up on fret four or seven, there's a beautiful sweetness for fingerpicking that rewards a dynamic approach and it even has an almost mandolin-like woodiness when strummed. It handles deep open tunings admirably, too. Americana in a box? I'd say so. Keep an eye on our YouTube channel as we'll be posting a video soon.

The key is to work slowly and keep checking the fit. Ideally the ring under the rounded top of the pin will end up sitting 1.5mm or so above the bridge. Again, I choose not to use the plastic pins Martin supply and buy some cheap bone pins on eBay instead.

SADDLING UP

The Allparts saddle arrived slightly too thick and long for the bridge slot – which is exactly what I want. I saw it to the required length and reduce the thickness using a piece of 240-grit paper fixed to a flat surface with double-sided tape. After several cycles of sanding and checking, the thickness is about right and I round over the saddle ends to match the ends of the slot.

With small angled notches sanded at each end of the underside, the saddle is installed and I draw pencil lines onto the saddle along the top of the bridge. With the saddle removed, I use a downloaded radius gauge (www.pickguardian.com) to mark a fingerboard matching curve onto the saddle.

A file quickly establishes a curve across the saddle's top and I quickly round it over. I leave a lot of saddle proud of the bridge simply to get the guitar strung up – I'm not looking for finesse at this point.

NUT JOB

Again cutting nut slots requires specialist tools – namely a set of nut files. They're not cheap and if you don't plan on doing this very often, it may be cheaper to leave this bit to a pro. Since I own a set of nut files I do the job myself, starting with the two E strings.

A spacing of 36mm seems about right, and I know it will feel familiar and comfortable for me. The remaining strings are installed, lightly tensioned and held in position with a capo at the 2nd fret.

This allows me to get the string spacings evened out, mark the nut and file four more shallow slots. The moment has finally arrived when I can tune the guitar to concert pitch and – assuming it doesn't fall to pieces – get an inkling of what it's going to sound like.

STRUNG UP

Tuning is accomplished without any drama and now I have to make the guitar playable. I begin by adjusting the truss rod, which requires a special tool. Martin doesn't include a suitably long Allen wrench with the kit, but they're available cheaply online and I use mine to achieve a tiny amount of relief at the 7th fret.

A set of 0.012 gauge Martin 80/20 strings is included with the kit and while not what I usually use, they're more than adequate for this initial setup. Gradually the nut slots are deepened and I end up lowering the saddle, too. The final hours of this year-long project are a bit of a blur, but it seems that I suddenly have a playable guitar. Barring a bit of nut and saddle polishing, it's all done.

FINISHING UP

Earlier in the project, one reader made the not unreasonable point that this is more guitar assembly than guitar building. After all, the neck and neck block come straight off a CNC machine, the sides are pre-bent and the top is pre-joined

and routed for the soundhole and its rosette.

However, if what has been done here is merely 'assembly', then the same accusation could me made of almost any major guitar company. Believe it or not, it's the way most of the boutique builders operate, too.

I dare say that many of us would be capable of building from scratch if we needed to, but going with a kit means you don't have to invest heavily in specialist tools and spend countless hours honing specialist skills that you will seldom use.

I'd argue that making your own fingerboard qualifies as 'building' and voicing the top and back has a more significant impact on the end result than whether you do your own bending and routing. If that means sharing the credit with the good folks at Martin, then I'm happy to do it because this is a great quality kit.

But is it all worth the effort? My answer is an unequivocal yes. Granted I spent a little extra on customising my guitar, but that's a big part of the appeal when doing a self-build. Consider the specs: authentic pre-war bracing, hot hide glue construction and a hand rubbed nitrocellulose finish. These are the features reserved for Martin's most prestigious and expensive models.

Factor in a shaded top, your choice of tuners, binding, rosette, and a custom neck profile, and it's a pretty attractive feature set. Clearly the finished result will depend on your skill level, but you can always contract out any parts that you feel are beyond your abilities – I did at several points in the build.

Finally, the important bit – how does it sound? It's not for me to say but check out the sidebar on the opposite page for some thoughts from the editor...

NEXT MONTH...

With the Martin kit build finally at an end, Huw turns his attention back to the Greco Goldtop conversion project

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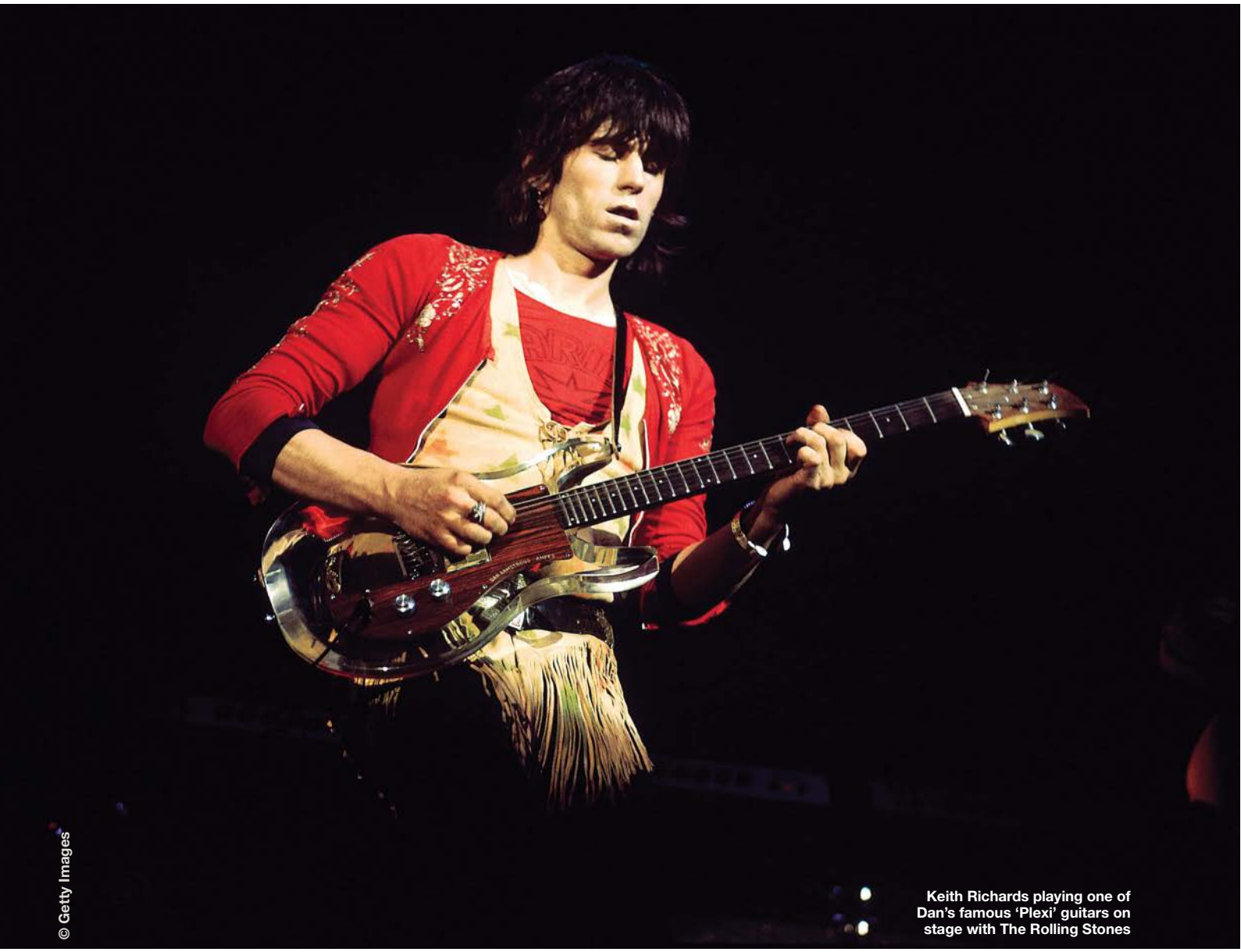


© Getty Images

Keith Richards playing one of Dan's famous 'Plexi' guitars on stage with The Rolling Stones

DAN ARMSTRONG

At different points in Dan Armstrong's career he was a session player, a respected tech, a guitar designer, a pedal and amp builder, and a pickup manufacturer. Yet in each endeavour, he made his mark. Huw Price profiles a polymath...

Dan Armstrong was born in Pittsburgh on 7 October 1934. He began playing guitar aged 11 and later played double bass in his school orchestra. By the time he left school, Dan was already gigging and he eventually made the decision to move to New York to become a professional jazz guitarist.

Struggling to find consistent work in the Big Apple, Dan started using his self-taught engineering and electronics skills to take on setup and wiring work for guitar retailer Eddie Bell. He also enjoyed jamming and having met a number of pro players that way, Dan finally started to get studio and touring work.

For this work, Dan would often rent equipment from a store called Carroll's, and after a while the owner noticed that his instruments were returning in better playing condition than when they left. This led to more setup work, and with guitar music all the rage, Dan opened 'Dan Armstrong's Guitar Service' on 48th Street, where his customers included John Sebastian, Jack Bruce, Wes Montgomery and Jimi Hendrix.

Dan's musical career continued in tandem with his repair work, and during 1967 he and his friend Charlie Brown were part of Van Morrison's touring band. Later they formed a band with a singer called Carly Simon. Dan and Carly became romantically involved, and although Simon has only ever revealed the identity of one of the three subjects of her hit song *You're So Vain* – actor Warren Beatty – some believe Dan to be one of the other two.

Dan's shop was a great success, becoming a meeting place and jamming venue for

THE AMPEG DAN ARMSTRONG WAS AN INSTANT HIT THANKS IN NO SMALL PART TO KEITH RICHARDS USING ONE ON TOUR WITH THE ROLLING STONES IN 1969

countless New York musicians. But when the building was scheduled for demolition, he relocated to trendy Greenwich Village.

Lou Reed was a friend and customer who would pester Dan for extra pickups in his guitar for more power, while Dan would patiently explain that it was the type of pickup that was important and not the number you had in your guitar. Around this time Dan hired future vintage-guitar dealer Matt Umanov, who by this point was already an established luthier. Umanov tended to carry out the repairs and restorations in the shop, while Dan handled custom work and modifications.

AMPEG'D UP

In 1968, Ampeg had bought the Grammer guitar factory in Nashville, and shortly after asked Dan to consult with them to help them improve the steel-string acoustics the company made. Never one to mince words, Dan instead suggested that as a manufacturer of amplifiers, Ampeg would be better off making electric guitars instead of acoustics. Ampeg clearly liked his moxie, as he was soon contracted to design a range of instruments and by 1969 he and Matt Umanov had finished the iconic and unconventional prototypes.

Featuring transparent Lucite (acrylic) bodies with 24 frets clear of the body and pickup modules that could slide in and out without removing the strings, the designs were some of the most radical the guitar world had seen. But unlike many unconventional electrics, the Ampeg Dan Armstrong (aka 'See-throughs' or erroneously, 'Plexis') were an instant hit thanks in no small part to Keith Richards using one on The Rolling Stones' 1969 US tour.

Six pickup modules were designed by Dan and New York pickup guru Bill Lawrence, and two were supplied with each guitar or bass. As a double-bass player, Dan was also an early advocate of the fretless electric bass and around 150 fretless Ampeg basses were produced.

The further endorsement of Joe Walsh, Leslie West, Paul McCartney, Jack Bruce, Geezer Butler, Bill Wyman and others meant that Ampeg was making about 600 instruments a month by 1971, but production abruptly ceased that year after Dan and Ampeg fell out, for reasons that we'll go on to explain shortly...

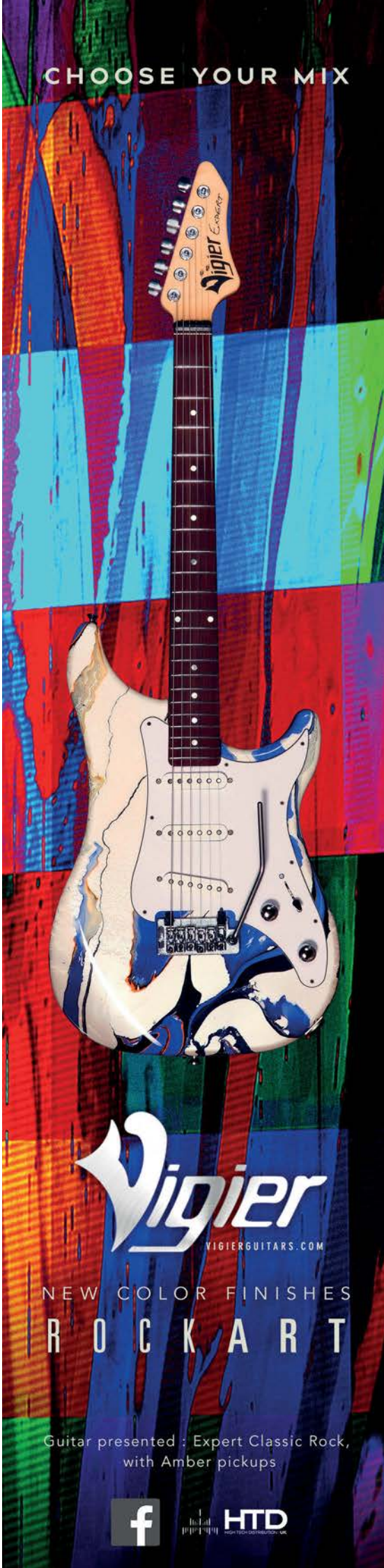
Before we get to that, it's also worth mentioning Dan's other guitar project. By 1969, Danelectro sales had flatlined and the company was sold to William C Herring. The following year Herring met with Dan and Armstrong agreed to start manufacturing modified Danelectros using the remaining stock of bodies and necks.

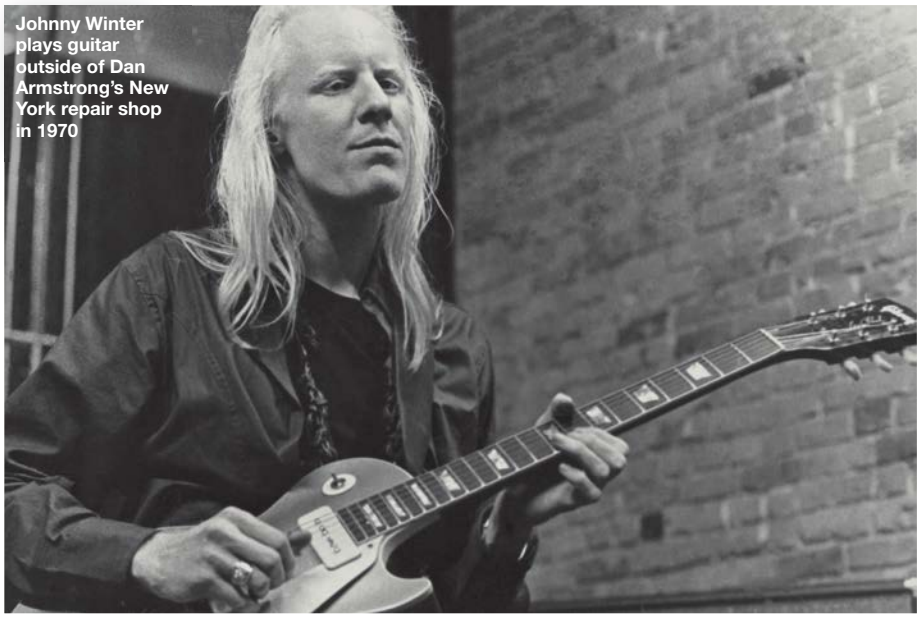
These were sold through Ampeg and over the counter at Dan's repair shop (which by that time had evolved into a retail outlet via which Dan even marketed his own brand of strings), something that would ultimately lead to the demise of his see-through guitar.

AMPS FOR THE MEMORIES

Dan's establishment sold Fender and Marshall amps, and given his relationship with the company, Dan decided to start stocking Ampeg amps, too – but there was a problem. While Ampeg bass amps sold fine, their guitar amps often sat in the shop gathering dust, primarily because Ampeg's owners were reluctant to make the loud, overdrivable guitar amps that the 1970s public wanted.

To try and turn this situation around, Dan teamed up with an amp




Johnny Winter plays guitar outside of Dan Armstrong's New York repair shop in 1970

DAN'S ORANGE SQUEEZER COMPRESSOR CAME TO BE REGARDED AS INDISPENSABLE FOR LOS ANGELES SESSION GUITARISTS IN THE 1970S

tech called Tom Duffy and together they set about hot-rodding the shop's Ampeg stock. Consequently, sales improved dramatically and Ampeg's new owners took notice. They requested more information, and in good faith, Dan sent them schematics, without agreeing royalty payments in advance.

Ampeg also wanted a more powerful bass amp that could compete with the popular Acoustic 361 amp, and Dan came up with the basic ideas for the SVT and the V Series of rock-oriented guitar amps. These amps carried over many of the mods that Dan and Tom Duffy had developed, although Ampeg's own team was also involved.

Former Ampeg engineer Steve Constantelos recalled, "I knew Dan well – he was a very nice man and a designing genius. Bill Hughes and I worked closely designing the SVT and V series amps, but a lot of this was built around Dan's designs."

By 1970 these new Ampeg amps were in production, but Dan and Ampeg were in dispute over the payments he was due for his part in their creation. Such was the disagreement, it brought Dan's involvement with the company to an end, and his refusal to renew his contract meant that guitar and bass production had to cease with it. A bitter end, then – but while it lasted, the relationship did produce some classic instruments and set a new standard for rock bass amplification.

CROSSING THE WATER

The end of his relationship with Ampeg also coincided with the end of Dan's New York shop. Dan had a lot on in the late 60s, between his involvement in Ampeg and also helping his friend Neil Diamond set up a guitar factory. As such he couldn't commit as much time to the shop as before – and given that much of the work in the shop came because musicians liked Dan to maintain their instruments, business was slowing down. Friend and employee Steve Kubica suggests Dan "dropped the ball" as his other interests took his focus away from maintaining what was a successful business.

But it's understandable that a guy like Dan would have become a little bored of doing setups and fret dresses, and in 1971 he decided to close the struggling business and move to the UK with his British girlfriend, Jacqueline Pierce. His sons Kent and Eric following shortly afterwards, with Kent going on to establish both Rainbow Pickups and WD Music.

After a brief spell at Orange, Dan teamed up with Boosey & Hawkes to produce a line of Dan Armstrong guitar amplifiers built with Partridge transformers, EL34 tubes and a hybrid valve/transistor preamp. The most distinctive features were slider controls with an eight-band graphic equaliser.

Next Dan teamed up with Tony Pitt to get back into guitar building, with finance from Island Records. Although virtually identical in shape to the Ampegs, the 'London Series' instruments featured Honduras mahogany bodies with set necks, but only 330 were made. The guitar and amp projects lasted until the mid-70s when Dan returned to the US, but his most successful UK enterprise was a venture into effects.

EFFECT YOURSELF

Stompboxes had been commonplace on stages for years but typically Dan didn't follow convention when it came to building guitar and bass effects. Instead Dan Armstrong and his design partner George Merriman built them into compact aluminium cases with protruding jacks that plugged directly into the guitar.

The range included the Blue Clipper distortion, Yellow Humper bass EQ, Red Ranger booster, Purple Peaker guitar EQ, Green Ringer octave fuzz and the Orange Squeezer compressor. The latter came to be regarded as indispensable for LA session guitarists in the 70s, and was a favourite of Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter, Ry Cooder and Mark Knopfler.

At first the effects were made in the UK by Wareham, but Dan struck a licensing deal for Musitronics (Mu-Tron) to take over production in the US. Production ceased in 1978, and Dan's son Kent acquired the trademark along with bankrupt stock from Wareham, and began making reissues.

KEEPING ACTIVE

Dan's later years saw him get involved with Fender, where he designed a couple of amps, as well as the active circuitry and control layout for the much-maligned 'The Strat'. He would also publish guitar wiring schematics in various guitar magazines. In an era when guitarists loved to have countless tone options – even if many sounded dreadful – Dan's designs were a cut above.

Most of the 1980s was spent working for Schecter, where Dan – who had been winding pickups since the 1960s – helped to design a new pickup series. He also designed guitars for Westone and Alvarez, and developed a line of high power but lightweight speaker cabinets that were sold by Cerwin Vega as 'Dan Armstrong Hot Cabs'.

By the late 90s everything came full circle. Dan had moved back and forth between the US and the UK a few times and he ended up working with Ampeg once again. Being under new ownership, terms were agreed to reissue the Lucite guitars with FujiGen Gakki handling the manufacturing in Japan.

Friends and colleagues variously describe Dan as approachable, friendly, volatile, visionary and able to laugh at himself. Kent Armstrong says his father was a thinker and ideas man rather than someone prepared to do the grunt work.

He also describes him as a 'musical savant' who could learn to play any instrument within a couple of hours. He loved chilli and pizza, hated vegetables and "smoked like a locomotive". He was sadly diagnosed with emphysema while still in his 50s and he succumbed to congestive heart failure in 2004 at the age of 69.

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MODAL TEXTURES

Modal chords can be a gateway to dreamy textures and ethereal tones. Rod Fogg gets scaly...

The first chord in figure 1 of this month's column is a regular Am7 chord with an open A string in the bass. As usual, the chord is built in thirds – notes which are three steps apart. A is the root, C is the third (minor in this case) E is the fifth and G the minor seventh. These notes can also be thought of as notes from a scale – in fact there are three major scales in which these four notes occur; C major, F major and G major. For the sake of this exercise, let's imagine they come from the G major scale, and we are going to move each note up the guitar to the next note of the scale. So A will become B, E will become F♯, C moves to D and G goes up two frets to A and we've arrived at the next chord in the example.

This is a B minor chord, but we've kept the open A string in the bass. This is what's known as a 'pedal' note – a note which stays the same while the harmony changes around it. Working our way through figure 1, the remaining three chords have been treated the same as the first two, each shape moving up to the next note of the scale on each string. Figure 2 takes the same approach but works its way down the guitar ending on chord consisting of just open strings – yes, Em7/A is a thing!

You can play these chords fingerstyle on your acoustic, possibly breaking them up into arpeggios, or on your reverb and delay drenched electric. Either way, try separating out the bass note and adding the rest of the chord afterwards and also try selecting any two chords and alternating between them to produce a dreamy groove.

The first three chords of figure 1 make a nice groove if you play them spread over two bars like this: Am7, Bm7; Cmaj7, Bm7.

Here is a theory moment before we move on – if you take a G major scale and play it starting on A, or to put it another way, as if A is your key centre, you will be playing an A Dorian mode. Explaining modes is a bit beyond the scope of this article, but if you've

Figure 1

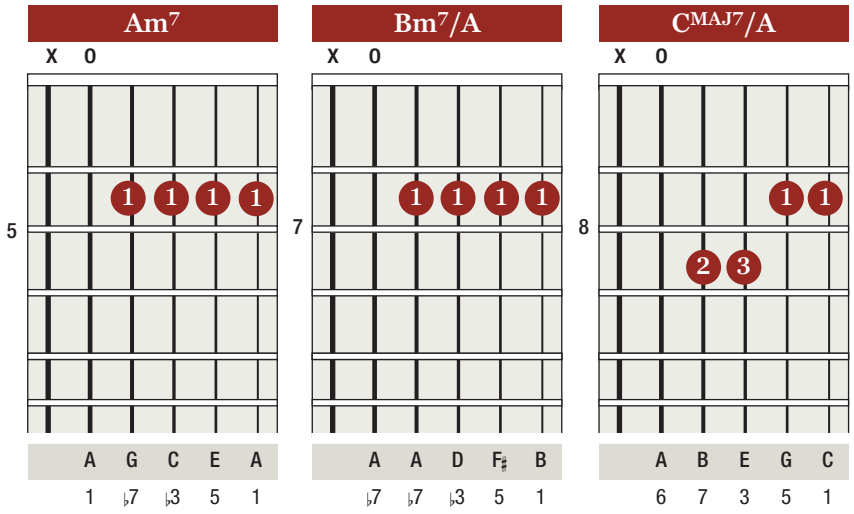
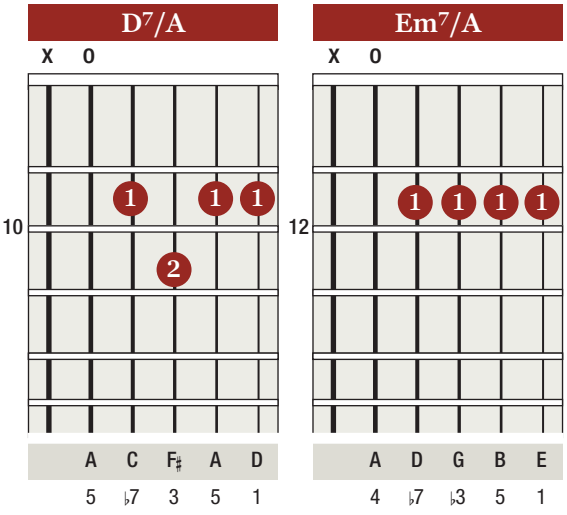


Figure 1 (cont)



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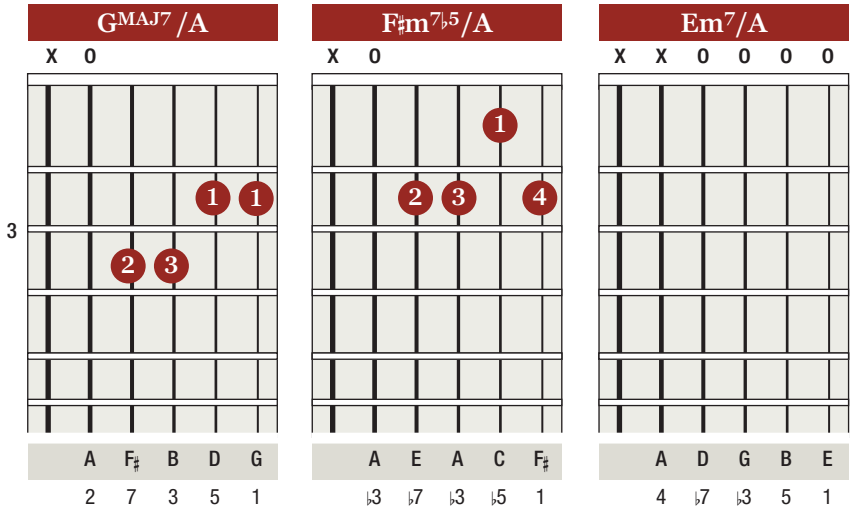

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Figure 3

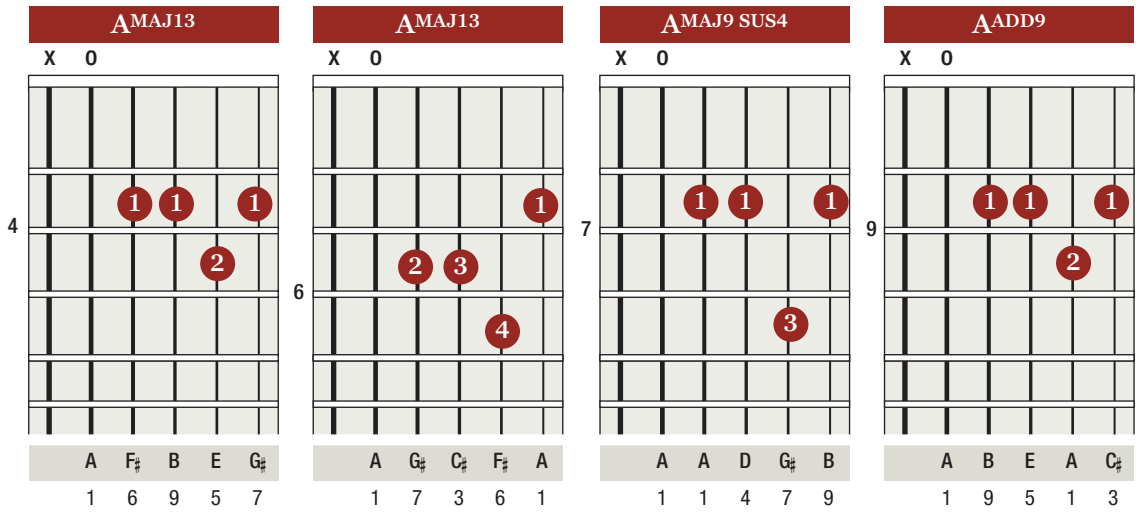
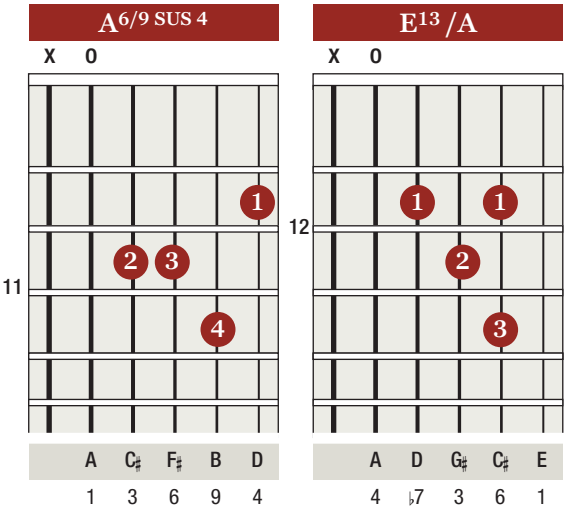


Figure 3 (cont)



already realised we are dealing with Dorian textures, pat yourself on the back.

Let's see what happens if you take a shape that looks less like a recognisable chord and move it around while keeping to scale tones as we did in figures 1 and 2. In figure 3, we are in the key of A major and have grabbed a shape that is a pile of perfect fourths with a major third on top. We've called it Amaj13. Sharp-eyed readers will notice that there is actually no major third in this chord, but the name is close enough. As before, we've gone up the guitar in the first instance and then worked our way down in figure 4, and done our best to come up with meaningful names for the shapes. What you get is a whole sequence of wistful, floaty summery textures – and a set of unfamiliar chord shapes. For modaholics the A major scale could also be called the A Ionian mode, so we have eight chord shapes all generating an Ionian tonality.

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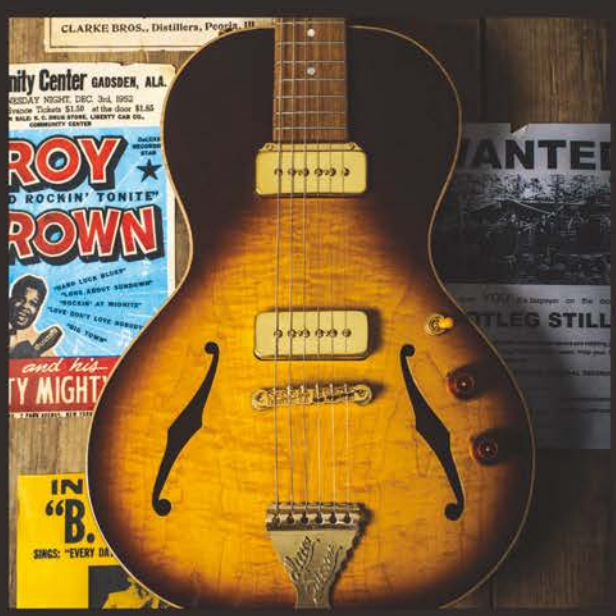

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Figure 4

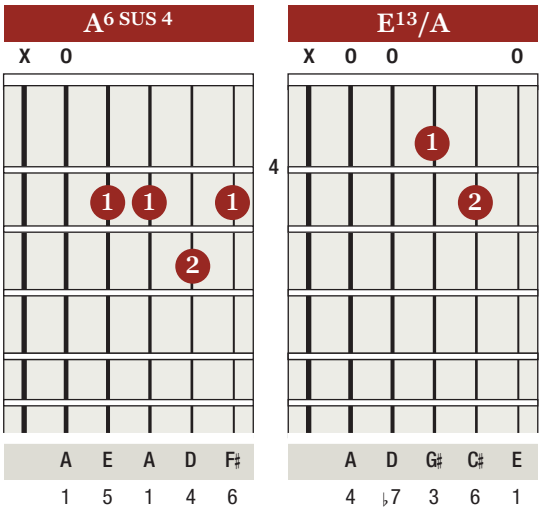


Figure 5 hops the shapes from figure 1 across a string to E Dorian, with the open E string as our pedal note. We have sketched out the first four chords, and you could have a go at working out the rest. Remember that an E Dorian mode is based on the second step of a D major scale, which includes F sharp and C sharp, so sharpen those two notes when they come around.

On to figure 6 and we find the E pedal is still present, but this time we are using the major or Ionian mode as we did in figures 3 and 4. As before we have only given you the first four chords so there might be a little homework to do here as well. The E major scale has four sharps, F#, C#, G# and D#, so sharpen those notes as you progress each shape up the neck. Also, the first Emaj13 chord could be played with just one finger – as demonstrated with the fourth chord of the set.

Enjoy experimenting with these modal textures and we'll be back next month.

Figure 5

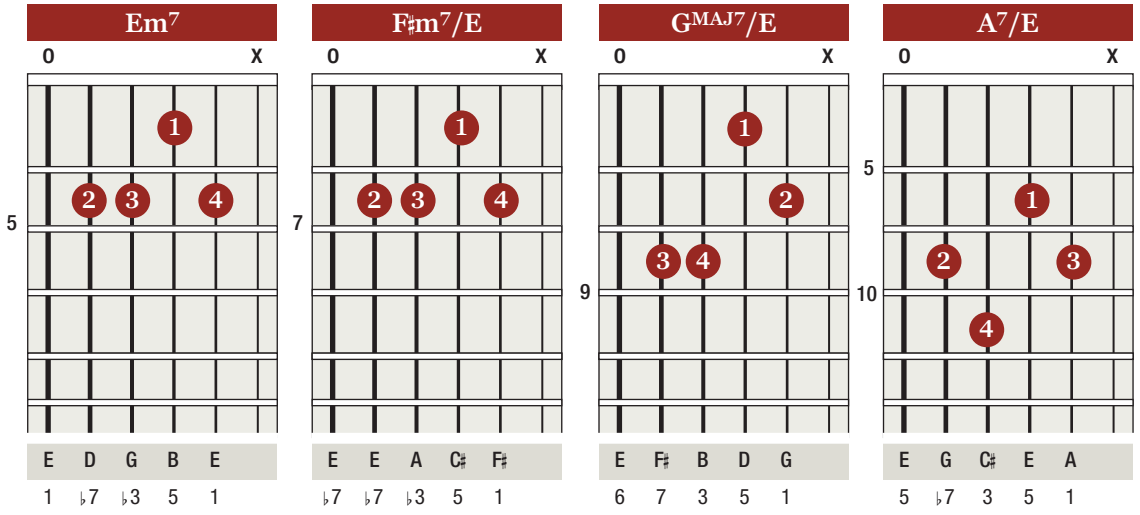
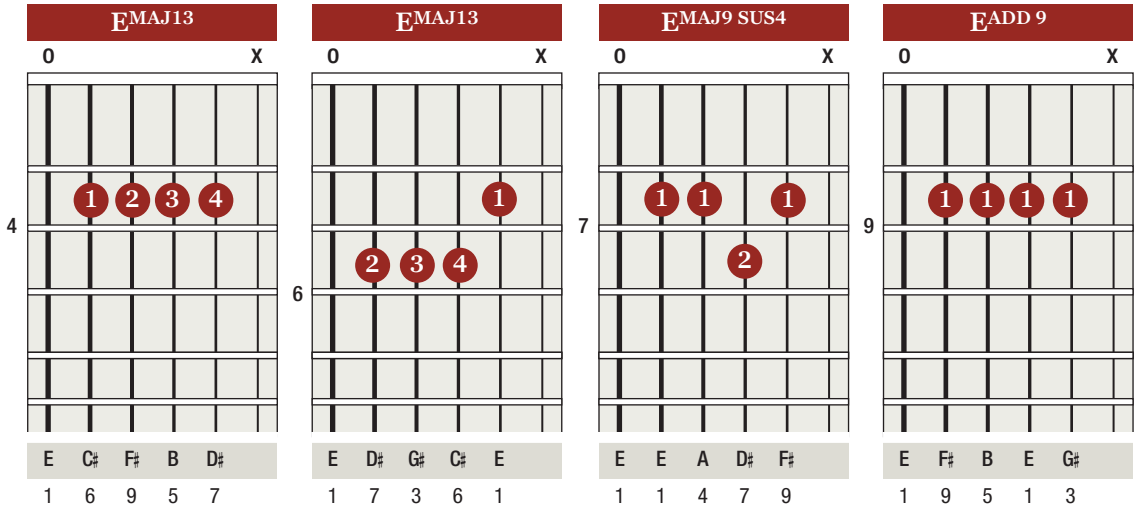


Figure 6



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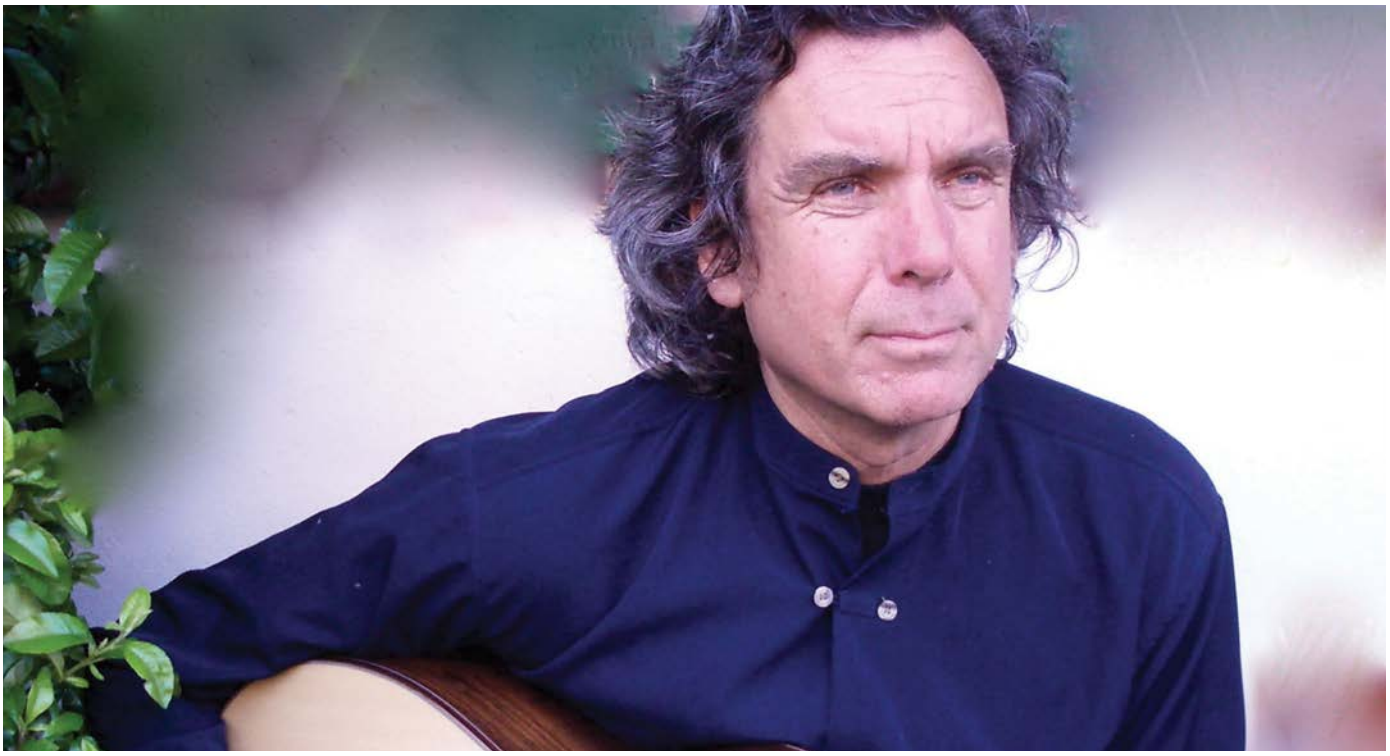

JOHN ETHERIDGE

The English fusion maestro and Soft Machine guitarist on loose trousers, car dancing, and retiring to woodshed...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"The best acoustic guitar I've ever had is my Collings OM1, but the guitar that I've had the longest is a 1951 Gibson ES-150, which was the first jazz guitar I bought. I hardly ever play it these days, but it represents something about history and continuity. I also love my two regular electrics – my signature model Fret-King Elise and my Martyn Booth Custom."

2 In another life I'd have been...
"I did a degree in Art History and quite fancied working in a museum and playing music for fun. But when I got to London I started working and never got a chance to potter round amongst the ancient artefacts!"

3 The moment it all started...
"I saw The Shadows with Hank Marvin in *The Young Ones* – dodgy film – and suddenly there they were palying *The Savage*. Two red Strats and a Precision Bass... amazing! That was it!"

4 The one that got away...
"In 1981-2 I was fairly broke and I sold some lovely guitars foolishly – an old Martin OM, an original Gibson Charlie Christian ES-150. An Ovation that was specially made for me. Total regret. I don't hoard guitars, but I don't sell them any more either!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"I have many, but a good recent one: Soft Machine were playing in Paris and we had to cross town to get the train to Marseilles. We arrived with two minutes to spare, so everyone was running for the train. Our tour manager was carrying John Marshall's heavy cymbal cases, one in each hand... and as we raced for the train his trousers started to come down! There was no time to stop, as the guards were preparing to blow their whistles for departure, so he keeps running until his trousers finally reached his shoes! At which point the guards fall about laughing and forgot to blow the whistles, so we make the train!"

6 The best advice that I've ever been given...
"Probably the best advice was 'Don't do it' – but I did it anyway! Stephane Grappelli used to say to me when I played my best stuff in the first tune, 'Don't give it away - sell it'. Meaning, keep something back for later. Good advice."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I usually start with a slow chromatic scale and gradually speed it up. Also a chromatic scale jumping octaves is a good loosener. This is just to get the blood moving and then it's on to real music."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"I'm very partial to a decent cup of tea and this is very hard to get in Europe or the USA, where they don't understand these things! I ask for good quality English breakfast tea... this doesn't always happen, so my performance is affected! [laughs] Not really – I'm able to rise nobly above the disappointment..."

9 My guilty pleasure...
"I do a lot of driving and as the motorways of England are permanently being 'upgraded' there are never-ending jams on roads like the M6. I find it very therapeutic to put on a track like Peter Gabriel's *Sledgehamer* – which has the deepest bass groove – wind up the windows and belt it out while dancing in my seat like an old lunatic! It really helps to relieve the tension. The guilty pleasure is not the track – which is obviously a masterpiece – but the dancing!"

10 If I could play one thing...
"I have a band that plays Frank Zappa's music – The Zappatistas. We do *Peaches En Regalia* and there is a passage in there played by sax and keys, which is really tricky on guitar. Frank never played it but Dweezil does – I really should practise it! John Williams, the great classical guitarist, with whom I play regularly, has some mind-blowing pieces. I particularly like *El Tortumo*, but it would take me years – I'm going to retire and work eight hours a day on it!"

Soft Machine's new album, *Hidden Details* is out now on Dyad Records

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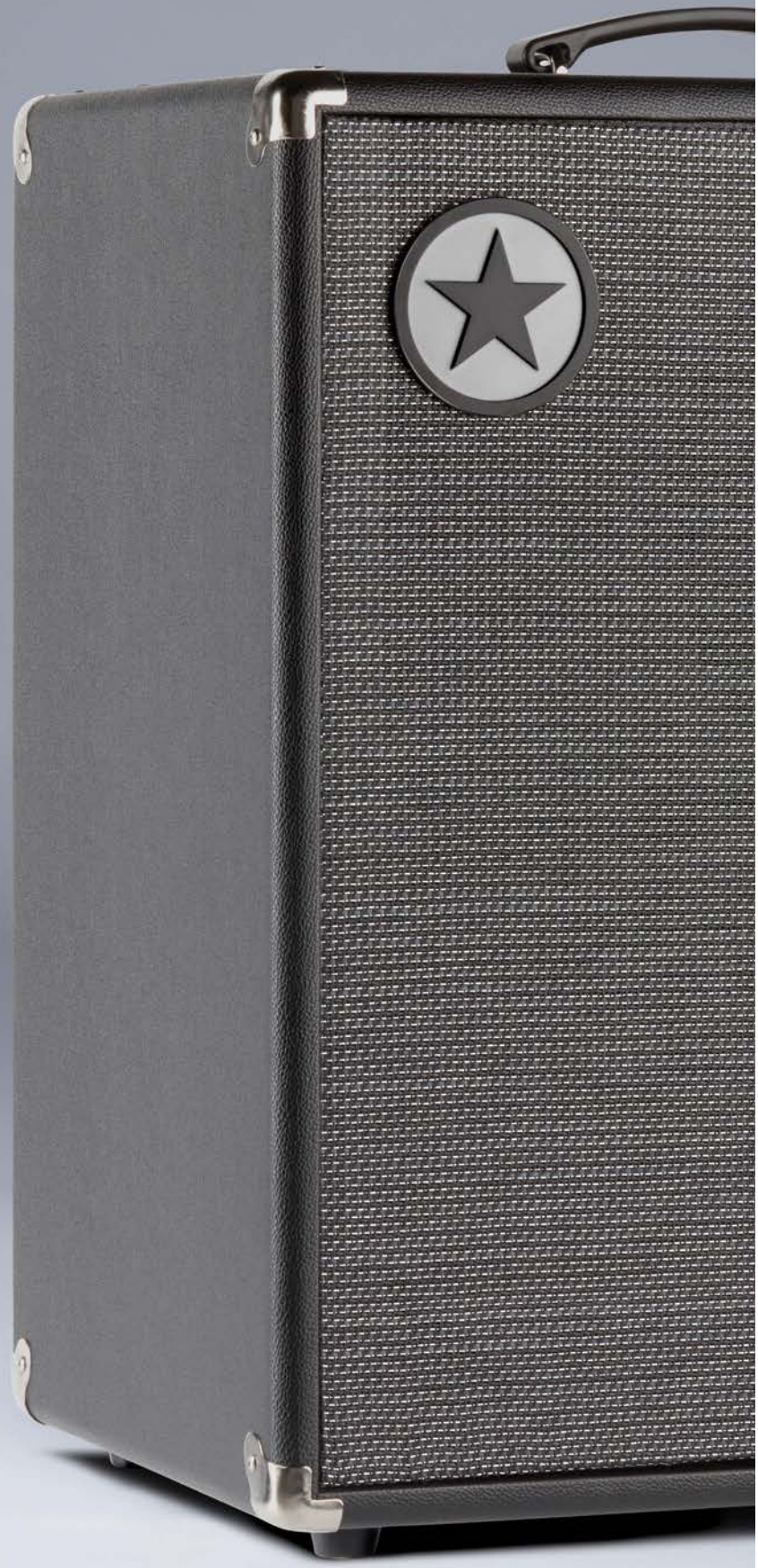

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